Santa Claus in Summer

by

Compton Mackenzie

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Santa Claus in Summer.

by Compton Mackenzie.

with drawings by A. H. Watson.

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To

DIANA AND BOBBIE

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CHAPTER I THE FAIRY FOREST

SANTA CLAUS IN SUMMER

CHAPTER I THE FAIRY FOREST

ONCE upon a fairy time (which means to say as often as you like any time yesterday, to-day, last year, a hundred years ago, or the day after to-morrow) it was midsummer in a great forest that stretched for miles and miles between the farthest hills and the nearest sea. You could only find this forest in a fairy atlas; but even if you happened to possess such a volume I'm sure I don't know how you would ever reach your destination. I believe that the telegraph wires when they disappear above the windows of a train would take you there; but then how is one to jump on to them before they come bounding back to become ordinary telegraph wires again? I myself visited the forest in dreams, which is why I'm able to tell you a good deal about it. Unfortunately we cannot regulate our dreams. I suppose that if we were able to know exactly when we fell asleep we could dream what we wanted, but I have never yet met a person who knew when he was falling asleep. Have you? Yet we know when we are falling downstairs. It's all very strange . . . it was a warm midsummer day in a great forest, a warm, sweet-scented, buzzful midsummer day, the sort of day that only seems to happen when you are in school, the sort of day when you wish you could be that bluebottle and discover at last where the classroom window is open and fly out like him to go buzzing away into the sunny weather. Still, if you were a bluebottle, you might not care for it, because as likely as not you would feel a bit awkward at first and be squashed on the window-pane before you had time to escape . . . it was a drowsy, droning, dreamy mid-

They read fairy stories written on leaves.

summer day, and Puck was walking along a wide glade in this forest gathering foxgloves to shade the Fairy Queen's glow-worms, because she had complained the night before that their bright lamps made her eyes ache when she was reading. 'Do fairies read?' you ask. Certainly they read. 'But what do they read?' Why, fairy stories written on leaves, of course, and much better stories than any you or I can read, I'll be bound. I have been told that the best stories are found on the leaves of the plane trees; but alas, I've never managed to read them myself. Perhaps you will be more successful.

"It's my opinion," said Puck to himself, "that

" Let me see, am I sixty million or sixty million and one next birthday ? "

Queen Titania expects too much of me. If she wants lampshades, why doesn't she send some of the maids to gather them ? But oh no, they're always too busy seeing that the royal spiders weave the right pattern in Her Majesty's new gossamer dress. *I'm* not always fussing my head with new clothes. I've worn the same suit for a thousand years, and I hope it will last me another thousand."

Puck, as you probably know, is much larger than the ordinary fairy, and he felt that gathering foxgloves for lampshades was beneath his dignity. All the same, between you and me, he had to climb for the best flowers. . . .

Far away in the depths of the forest sounded an elfin horn.

" Poor sport, hunting the stag-beetle by day," Puck grumbled to himself. " I'm astonished at Oberon's bothering about it. Oh dear, oh dear, I sometimes wish I was a mortal. One gets immortally tired of fairy life. Let me see, am I sixty million or sixty million and one next birthday ? "

Puck wandered on, trying to remember his exact age, until he nearly trod on two very small brown fairies who were busily engaged among the grass.

" Sorry," he said patronizingly. " I hardly saw you." He was rather fond of calling attention to his superior height. What are you fellows up to ? "

" We're trapping woolly-bear caterpillars with snapdragons to make a fur wrap for Her Majesty," they told him.

Puck snorted. It was a curious kind of noise, something between the scraping of a knife and the creaking of a door and the sneeze of a guinea-pig and the pop of a paper-bag and the rattle of a money-box and somebody coughing inside a wardrobe.

The two brown fairies were frightened and flew away as fast as they could, so fast that one of them collided with a butterfly and grazed his wings.

"Silly little cowards," Puck scoffed. "Hullo, what's that?"

His pointed ears stood up like a dog's while he listened.

"It sounds as if somebody was cutting down trees," he muttered. "That won't do at all."

Puck was anxious, because so many fairies spend the winter inside trees, and a mortal woodman who did not know which were the fairy homes might cause a great deal of inconvenience by cutting them down. He did not give another thought to Titania's lamp-shades, but hurried along toward the sound. He soon came upon the woodcutter, who was a plump old gentleman with a long white beard and rosy cheeks.

"Why, what a surprise," Puck cried. "Who would have expected to see you here?"

"Puck!" the old gentleman exclaimed jovially, with a laugh that would have reminded anybody who heard it of the wind rumbling in a chimney, a laugh that even on this drowsy, droning midsummer day made one feel tremendously energetic. "Hullo, old boy, I was going to call on you later on. How are you, my old friend?"

"Santa Claus, well met! But what brings you so far south at this season? I thought you never came below Iceland until Christmas."

"I used not," said Santa Claus, as he gave one last

mighty blow at the oak tree he was felling and brought it to the ground with a crash. "I used not," he went on, wiping his forehead and beaming at Puck over the handle of his axe. "But I've taken to it of late years. I found it did my reindeer good to feed up a bit on better pasturage than we can give them in my part of the world. You know, there are many more boys and girls than there used to be in our young days. There are, indeed. I've a team of twenty-four reindeer nowadays, and they have to do some travelling, I can tell you, to get through the heavy work on Christmas Eve. I've thought once or twice of suggesting that socks should be hung up instead of stockings."

"Why are you cutting down trees?" Puck asked.

"Wood for toys is scarce in my country. It's so cold there that the folks have cut down all the trees to keep themselves warm. Besides, it does my animals good to carry back a load. It gets them into condition for the great night. You needn't be worried," he added. "I know which trees are fairy homes. No danger of my cutting them down."

"Oh, I wasn't suggesting such a thing," said Puck quickly.

"And how's Fairyland?" the old gentleman enquired.

"Dull, very dull. The truth is I'm tired of it. I've lived there too long. I shall be sixty million, you know, next birthday."

Santa Claus raised his eyebrows and whistled, so that all the leaves of the forest rustled as they would rustle at the beginning of a storm.

"Will you be as much as that? You make me feel quite a baby. I'm only something over sixteen hundred. But I'm surprised to hear you complain of

"I can't imagine anybody's being dull in these lovely surroundings."

being dull. I can't imagine anybody's being dull in these lovely surroundings. You ought to spend a month or two dancing round the North Pole to keep yourself from freezing. Now that does become monotonous."

"I suppose that's why bears dance so well," said Puck. "It never struck me before."

"Wasn't that the horn of my old friend Oberon I heard just now?" Santa Claus asked. "Don't you ever go hunting?"

"Not stag-beetles," said Puck contemptuously. "And anyway, the pack of dog-roses he has now is a bad one. They're all too wild. They show their thorns if you make the least attempt to train them. Besides, I don't really care for these miniature sports. I don't mind big game like rats, or mouse-sticking with hedgehogs' squills; but, as you know, I'm a domestic sprite and, frankly, I prefer the company of mortals. At least I did until lately," he wound up. "But lately . . . however, I'm not going to spoil your holiday with my woes."

"Nonsense," said Santa Claus cheerily. "Here, come and sit down on this bank and tell me all about it. I knew by the way your wings were drooping that you were out of sorts. The

best cure for a grievance is to tell somebody all about it."

"I ought to be getting these lampshades for Titania," said Puck doubtfully. But he could not resist the friendliness of Santa Claus' invitation and, swinging himself up on the lowest branch of an old hawthorn tree that cast a pleasant shade upon the velvety green bank where Santa Claus was already reclining, he began his tale of woe.

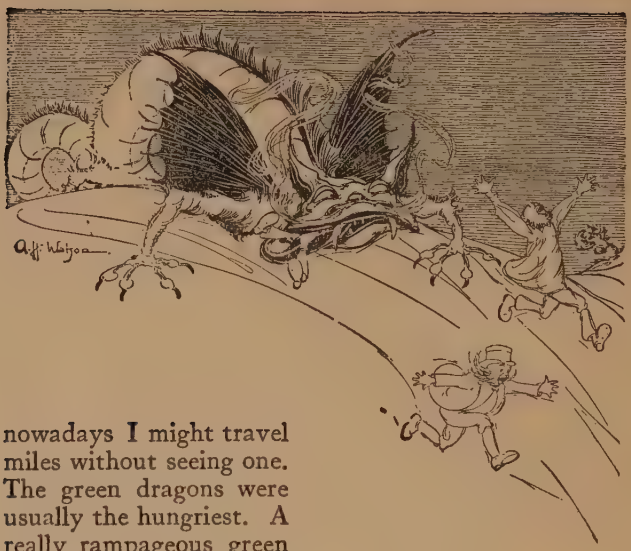
"You know I'm famous for playing all kinds of pranks. I suppose that nobody has a greater number of successful practical jokes to his credit than I have. I've made Oberon laugh with my tales of mischief till he hardly knew which way he was flying. Well, of late years I've given up playing the tricks myself. I've relied on children to keep up the tradition of getting into mischief. There was a strong movement some years ago, if you remember, to make your Christmas visit depend on the children's good behaviour during the year. But you would have nothing to do with it, I'm glad to say."

"Nothing at all," said Santa Claus firmly. "I disapproved of punishing children on Christmas Eve."

"And no doubt they guessed that," said Puck. "At any rate, the parents never made their children behave any better by dragging your name into the business. Well, you know what changes have taken place all over the world lately. I daresay once or twice you may have thought about using an aeroplane for the annual round?"

"Never!" Santa Claus shouted.

"I'm glad of it," Puck went on, "for I'm a fellow who likes old customs best. I've seen too much change in my long life. Years ago, for instance, I rarely went far without meeting a dragon. But



nowadays I might travel miles without seeing one. The green dragons were usually the hungriest. A really rampageous green dragon could make the quietest neighbourhood lively. Yes, I've known an emerald green dragon eat as many as fifty tough farmers in a morning. What appetites they had!" Puck fell into a dream about the past, nodding his head like a very old man. Suddenly he pulled himself together, and remembering that he was not old in anything but years, went on briskly. "To cut a long story

"Yes, I've known an emerald green dragon eat as many as fifty tough farmers in a morning."

short, I found myself more and more inclined to stay where I was and rely on children to keep up my reputation for mischief. I've paid for my laziness, because I offended Oberon, and the consequence is Titania thinks she can do what she likes with my time. However, I did get a certain amount of amusement from the village of Banbury, the nearest village to this forest."

"I know it well," said Santa Claus. "That's where they hang up the biggest stockings of all."

"Jack Horner again," cried Puck, slapping his leg.

"Jack Horner?" Santa Claus echoed.

"A greedy sanctimonious little prig, that's who Jack Horner is," said Puck angrily. "Soon after his arrival in Banbury, it was renamed Banbury Cross. It used to be Banbury Gay, you remember? Of course I know that the children in other villages are still mischievous, but, as I was telling you, I don't feel inclined to dash about as I used, and I don't see why my pet village should be under the fat thumb of Jack Horner. I assure you that there is not one child in Banbury nowadays who ever does anything naughty. I've gone round at night myself and broken a few plates and upset some bowls of milk and done my best to put a bit of life into the place, but it was no use. Everybody blamed the cat, and finally she went away to London, they tell me, to look for her kittens which Johnny Green, who is Jack Horner's chief supporter, took to St. Paul's."

"That's right," Santa Claus agreed. "She did go to London to get the Queen to do something about her kittens, and she was turned out of the palace for mousing under the throne. Finally she went to live with a little girl-friend of mine. And that little friend

of mine is just the little girl you want to make Banbury Cross gay once more."

Puck jumped down from his branch and perched himself on Santa Claus' foot.

"Tell me all about her," he begged.

"I'll do better than that," Santa Claus offered. "Sorry to disturb you, Puck, but you're sitting just on my favourite corn. Move a little bit along. Thanks, that's much more comfortable. Yes, I'll do better than tell you about her," he went on. "I'll take you to see her."

"When?" asked Puck, who was as suspicious as you are of vague promises.

"I'll take you there to-night—that is if you've nothing better to do. My reindeer are getting too fat already. A little exercise will do them good."

Puck hesitated.

"I don't know about to-night," he said gloomily. "We have our annual Midsummer Eve revels to-night. And very dull I find them. Titania has folded her wings against any new dances. So there we shall be jigging round the same old ring to the same old tunes. Last year I tried to liven up the ball by inviting some lady goblins of my acquaintance, but they weren't a success." Puck suddenly jumped off his friend's foot and began to gather foxgloves as fast as he could.

"I'll go to-night," he vowed.

"Bravo," said Santa Claus sleepily, "and now with your permission I'll take a nap till dusk, because my reindeer will want a steady hand to-night."

The old gentleman folded his arms, and in less than a minute was fast asleep and snoring like a thunder-

storm. Puck could hardly resist the temptation to tickle his nose with a grass-stalk; but in view of the evening's excursion he thought it wiser to refrain, and confine his energies to gathering lampshades for the Fairy Queen.

CHAPTER II THE FAIRY QUEEN
(*For Girls Only*)

St Patrick

CHAPTER II THE FAIRY QUEEN

(*For Girls Only*)

THE Fairy Queen sat in front of her mirror, powdering her face and admiring her new dress. (The mirror was a square inch of well-water from Truth's well, magically framed with beaten sunshine.) Her puff was a dandelion seed, her powder was shimmering dust shaken from the wing of a peach-blossom moth. Her new dress was woven of silvery gossamer tied up with rainbows, and she wore a crown of stardust and a necklace of dewdrops and snowflakes. Her fan was a bee's wing, and her shoes were made of willow-buds. (For combs she had the antennæ of moths and for a buttonhook the proboscis of a butterfly.) She brushed her golden hair with a hazel catkin and her clothes with wild barley. She washed her face with honey-dew in an acorn cup, and dried it on a towel made from the peel of a mushroom. Her pins were nettle-stings; but if it was very windy she fastened her hat with a wasp-sting, and of course she never went out in wet weather without putting on her thick shoes of chestnut rind.

"Your Majesty looks radiantly beautiful this evening," her fairy maids exclaimed in chorus.

"Yes, I fancy the dress becomes me," Titania simpered. "The royal spiders may have two flies apiece for their supper to-night, and an extra blue-bottle of wine."

What little girl wished just now she were a blue-bottle?

"Please, Your Majesty," said one of the fairy maids who was wearing a new skirt of poppy petals, and who, being a brunette, was very proud of the way it suited her complexion; "Please, Your Majesty, Mr. Puck has never brought in those lampshades Your Majesty commanded for the royal glow-worms."

The Fairy Queen sat in front of her mirror, powdering her face.

The dark fairy was making herself out so important that her companions would have liked to snub her.

The dark fairy was making herself out so important that her companions, who themselves had new dresses for the ball, would have liked to snub her; but they hated Puck even more than the conceited fairy, and so they echoed her complaint.

"Ring the bluebell," Titania commanded. "I *will* be obeyed."

Whether she was or not, I do not know, for at that

moment there was a flourish of elfin trumpet-shells gathered on some far-off fairy beach, and one of King Oberon's heralds presented himself at the door of Queen Titania's dressing-room to know if the King might enter and escort her to the revels.

Titania, anxious that her new dress should make a good impression, forgot all about Puck and was graciously pleased to receive the King. He was every bit as graciously pleased to be received, and really it was impossible not to sympathize with the murmur of admiration among the fairy maids when Oberon appeared clothed in a suit of glittering armour wrought from the scales of goldfish.

"Are you ready, my dear?" he graciously enquired.

"Quite ready, my love," she graciously replied.

Arm in arm Oberon and Titania graciously led the way to the dusky dancing-green, followed by an excited crowd of fairy courtiers, maids-of-honour, and ladies-in-waiting.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted a mob of humble working gnomes.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" shouted all the population of Fairyland, hovering on tipwing to see the royal procession float by.

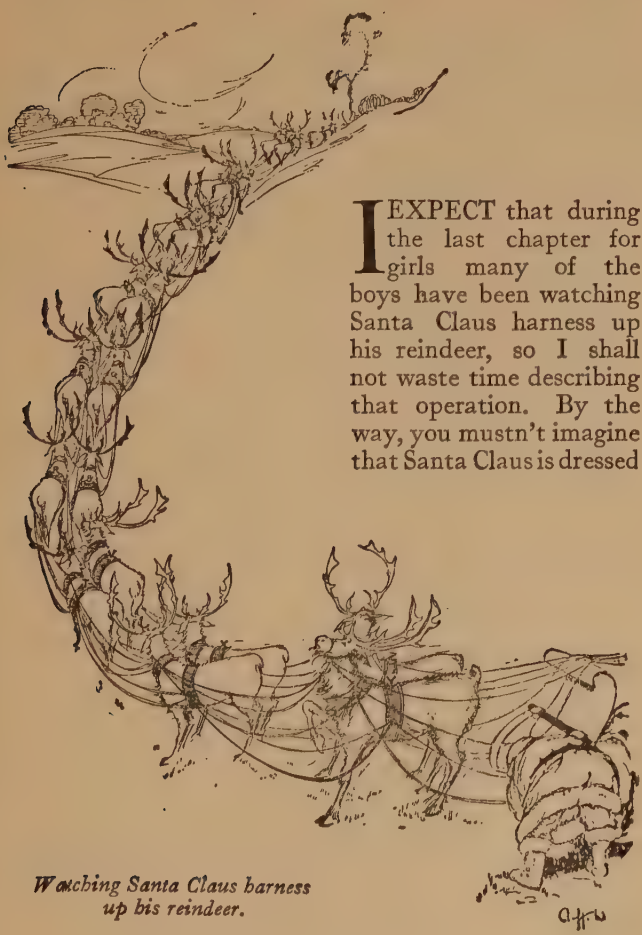
"Take your places for the first set of quadrilles," cried the master of the ceremonies. "Their Majesties have graciously signified their gracious consent to open the ball."

The orchestra seated in the deserted opening of a rabbit burrow struck up a fairy tune, such a tune as you, little girl, might hear if you fell asleep under a bower of honeysuckle on Midsummer Eve and were wakened by the moon.

The violins and violas were gnats and mosquitoes,

the violoncellos honey-bees, the double basses bumble-bees. Beetles wound their horns, a bull-frog croaked the bassoon, cockchafers made the clarionets, and the flutes were death's-head moths. Grasshoppers marked the rhythm of the dance on their castanets, and in a magic swamp close by an old bittern beat upon a mighty drum. The harps were streams of rippling water, and if ever the orchestra stopped in dread of mortal footsteps there was always an harmonious wind in the grass, and a nightingale pouring out her music among the leaves.

"Yes, it's all very pretty," said Puck to himself. "And I suppose if I hadn't seen the same dances and heard the same tunes since the beginning of the world, I should think it still prettier. But when all's said and done, we fairies can't get on without mortals. It wouldn't be any fun being invisible if there weren't a lot of ordinary people who had to be visible. Yes, we fairies owe a great deal to mortals. And so, hey for a ride with Santa Claus to see this little girl who is to make Banbury Cross Banbury Gay."



Watching Santa Claus harness up his reindeer.

I EXPECT that during the last chapter for girls many of the boys have been watching Santa Claus harness up his reindeer, so I shall not waste time describing that operation. By the way, you mustn't imagine that Santa Claus is dressed

in summer as you see him in winter, all in scarlet, with polar bearskin collars and cuffs, and icicles in his beard. No, when he leaves the North he goes into sky-blue, his clothes are trimmed with fleecy clouds, and his beard glistens with sunbeams. It is thus that you must picture him bending over to look at the traces and see that the runners of the sleigh are firmly fixed to the body. The reindeer were shaking their golden summer bells impatiently when Puck arrived.

"Come along, come along," Santa Claus exclaimed, bustling round, "I thought you were never coming."

"I had to give Titania the slip," Puck explained. "You've got a fine team there."

"Splendid, aren't they?" said Santa Claus. "I call them after the twenty-four letters of the alphabet. Well, A dear, how are you? Get back there, M dear! G dear, don't dig your horns into S dear."

"Twenty-four letters of the alphabet?" Puck repeated. "There are twenty-six letters."

"But you and I aren't reindeer," Santa Claus shouted with a jolly laugh. He would have dug Puck in the ribs to emphasize the joke if he had not been too fat and so unable to stoop as low. "Now, then, in you get, and up we go!"

He cracked his long whip, and with a tremendous bound the twenty-four reindeer leapt forward. They went up perpendicularly at first because each pair of animals lowered their heads and tossed the pair in front of them up on their horns. It was rather extraordinary even to an old fairy like Puck to see reindeer reaching the air in this fashion.

"Of course they can only turn somersaults like that in Summer," Santa Claus explained. "I have to be careful never to get lower than the housetops in

Winter. If my animals once came down to earth in Winter, I doubt if I should ever get them up again."

"Couldn't they turn wintersaults?" Puck suggested.

"Of course they could," answered their driver contemptuously, "but a wintersault would take them down, not up. That's the way we go back to the North Pole. In March they begin to practise for the journey South by turning springsaults, and I need scarcely add that autumnsalts are impossible, because everything falls in Autumn."

"In that case," Puck argued, "how do you get them up in the air from the North Pole?"

"It strikes me," said Santa Claus, "that you're just asking questions because you've got nothing better to do. I shouldn't have thought it was necessary to point out that the top of the North Pole is already a good way up in the air! We start from the top."

Puck was not convinced.

"But how do they get to the top of the pole?"

"Good gracious me!" Santa Claus exclaimed. "The polar bears climb up and down it all day long."

"Bears are bears," Puck persisted.

"Quite so. And reindeer are reindeer. They climb up by each other's horns."

"I'd like to visit you at home some day," said Puck, who thought that this was the most tactful way of implying that he did not believe all Santa Claus was telling him.

"Come when you like," said the old gentleman. "I'd take you there to-night if you were wearing anything thicker than milkskin."

"This is my evening dress," said Puck in an offended tone. "I changed partly to let everybody think I was going to the ball, and partly to please

The man in the moon
Came down too soon
And asked the way to
Norwich.
He went by the South
And burnt his mouth
With eating cold pease
porridge.

this little girl. It's the finest Guernsey milkskin. To hear you talk one would think that I was wearing my thousand year old suit of green pond scum."

Like most people who are fond of teasing other people, Puck had a dread of being laughed at himself.

"Don't get angry, old boy," said Santa Claus. "I meant my invitation quite sincerely. And next Christmas I'll prove it by bringing you down an ermine suit."

During this conversation the reindeer had ceased their somersaults and were now galloping across the level sky. Several fairies late for the ball passed the sleigh and put spurs to their bats when Puck called out that the first quadrilles would be over by now.

"I always ride an owl myself," said Puck. "The softest seat and the steadiest motion. But of course few fairies can manage an owl. The moon is looking very full to-night," he went on. "I suppose the man there has been eating porridge again." Puck began to sing:

The man in the moon
Came down too soon
And asked the way to Norwich.
He went by the South
And burnt his mouth
With eating cold pease porridge.

'So next time," Santa Claus went on:

The man in the moon
Came down with a spoon
And asked the way to Ipswich.
He went by the West
Because it was best
Not to eat and burn his lips which.

"Which what?" Puck asked.

"Which he burnt before," said Santa Claus.

"That's not a song," Puck observed.

"It's as good a song as yours. But if you really

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want to know why the moon is so full I can tell you. It's because he's loaded up with shooting stars."

"Well, I think it's porridge," said Puck obstinately. "Otherwise there wouldn't be a song about it. Nobody writes songs about nothing."

At this moment, before he could reply to Puck's assertion, Santa Claus stood up in the sleigh and shouted:

"Keep to the left with your basket, will you? Do you want the whole sky to yourself?"

"Beaver! Beaver!" piped a thin voice close to the sleigh, as a very old woman sitting in a basket raced by, just managing to avoid a collision.

Santa Claus shook his whip at her, and the old woman shook a broom back at him.

"Why they employ an old woman like that to sweep the cobwebs off the sky I don't know," Santa Claus grumbled. "She's got no control over that basket of hers. I consider her a public nuisance. She goes seventeen times as high as the moon, so one never knows where one will meet her. Besides, I don't think it's fair to sweep all the cobwebs down on the earth, which is what she does."

"If I'd known that," said Puck, "I would have tried to upset her. I love upsetting old women."

He had no sooner said this than the old woman came whirling past again in her basket to make a jab at Puck with her broom.

"Spider! spider!" she piped.

"I'm not a spider," Puck shouted.

"As if there weren't cobwebs enough."

"Be off with you," Santa Claus commanded.

"Spider! Beaver! Beaver! Spider!" the old woman screamed. But A B C and D, the leading reindeer, lowered their heads and tossed the old woman

"Keep to the left with your basket, will you? Do you want the whole sky to yourself?"

Slowly the sleigh began to float down through the smoke.

in a basket seven hundred and seventy times as high as the moon, while the sleigh, which until now had been travelling over heavenly fields of deepest blue, was suddenly wrapt in smoke.

"What has happened?" Puck spluttered. "Where are we? Your reindeer must have upset the old woman's basket of cobwebs."

"We're over London," said Santa Claus. "That's why it's so dark."

He pulled up the reindeer as he spoke, for the air was so thick that they could actually stand still.

When the golden bells of the sleigh no longer sounded, from far away below came up sounds of other bells.

Ding-dong! Ding-dong!
Ding-dong bell!
Turn again Whittington,
Lord Mayor of London,
Ding-dong! Ding-dong!

Slowly the sleigh began to float down through the smoke until the travellers grew accustomed to the atmosphere and could behold the mighty city with the eyes of mortals. Seen thus it was very beautiful, twinkling with myriads of lights.

Yes, here where the sound of children's tears and the groans of the poor did not reach, it was even to a fairy as lovely as Fairyland. It was only when Santa Claus began to steer his way among the steeples that Puck understood how evil the mighty city was, for in all the steeples as they passed the bells were wrangling and jangling among themselves as if even they were corrupted by their environment.

"Oranges and lemons!" said the bells of St. Clement's, as they passed.

"They always ask me for oranges and lemons," said Santa Claus. "If I paid any attention, I should have none left for the children's stockings."

"Two sticks and an apple," gabbled the bells of Whitechapel.

"Nothing for any of you bells to-night," said Santa Claus, guiding his reindeer with great skill between the swaying steeples.

"Old Father Baldpate!" jeered the slow bells of Aldgate.

Santa Claus gave Aldgate steeple a good cut with his whip to teach it better manners in future.

"I hate these London bells," he said. "A muffin man's bell is worth the whole lot put together. Listen to them now!"

"You owe me ten shillings," the bells of St. Helen's were jangling, and in a horrid, rasping, rusty voice the bells of St. Martin's were yelling,

"You owe me five farthings!"

"The bells of Shoreditch are always borrowing from the others," Santa Claus explained. "That's what all the row is over."

"When will you pay me?" the bells of Old Bailey were booming.

"In justice to the bells of Old Bailey, I must admit that the bells of Shoreditch do owe them a great deal of money. It's not a question of shillings or farthings, but of several hundreds of pounds."

"When will you pay me?" the bells of Old Bailey clamoured once more.

"Oh, when I grow rich," the bells of Shoreditch answered sulkily.

"Pray, when will that be?" the bells of Stepney enquired more politely than the others.

"Hulloa, hark, there's that old curmudgeon, the great bell of Bow."

"I didn't know the bells of Shoreditch had been borrowing from Stepney. That's not fair," said Santa Claus. "The bells of Stepney are just as poor as those of Shoreditch. Hulloa, hark, there's that old curmudgeon the great bell of Bow."

"I'm sure I don't know," he was grumbling.

"Hark at him," said Santa Claus. "He's never lent any bell a farthing in his life, and he

never will, but it pleases him to discourage all the others."

"Brickbats and tiles," shouted the bells of St. Giles' in much excitement. "Look out, Santa Claus!"

"Thank you," said Santa Claus. "I can see them. And here we are on the roof of my little girl's house."

Santa Claus alighted from the sleigh, tethered his reindeer to a chimney stack and sat down on the parapet of the roof.

"Brickbats and tiles," the bells of St. Giles' kept clanging.

"I wish they'd stop," said Santa Claus. "I can't hear myself speak."

"It wouldn't take much to cut out their clappers," Puck suggested.

It seemed as if the bells must have heard Puck's suggestion, for they were instantly silent. The smoke had blown away, and the twinkling sky shed a deep blue silence over the housetops, a peace that you might go far and not find, not even if you dived to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

"It reminds me of home," said Puck quietly.

He was thinking of Fairyland.

"But what is that distant roaring?" he asked nervously.

"The roar of the traffic."

"It *is* an angry sound," said Puck. "I never heard even a dragon make an angrier sound than that."

Santa Claus was feeling rather practical, now that he was in London, and not at all inclined to discuss the comparative ferocity of dragons and traffic. He therefore changed the subject to the matter in hand.

"I ought to have explained on our way along," he said, "who this little girl is. As a matter of fact she

comes originally, or rather her mother came, from your part of the country. Do you know a Mrs. Hubbard, who used to live in Tanglewood Coppice ? "

" She's still there. I know the old lady well. I taught her dog the alphabet."

" Then I suppose you remember her husband the huntsman ? He and old Bunting were the King's huntsmen."

" I knew Huntsman Hubbard well," said Puck.

" Then you remember their daughter who ran off to London with Riding Hood the Highwayman ? "

" It broke the old man's heart," said Puck. " I remember Riding Hood used to boast that he was no worse than his ancestor, bold Robin Hood ; but Riding Hood would have robbed a blind beggar of his dog's collar. He was really bad."

" He was," Santa Claus agreed fervently. " Do you know he once had the impudence to try to hold up my sleigh ? Yes, sir, he stood on the top of St. Paul's and shouted, ' Your money or your life ! ' as I drove by."

" You don't mean it ? " cried Puck, becoming so excited over the old gentleman's tale that he nearly fell off the roof. " What did you do ? "

" I did nothing," said Santa Claus with much dignity. " But my reindeer tossed him down into the Thames. It saved the hangman a job. At the same time I wished it hadn't happened, because it chanced that the very first house I visited afterward was the house on whose roof you and I are now sitting. You may have noticed that the chimney is rather small ? "

" It doesn't look so small to me," said Puck, climbing up it and peering down.

" It may not look small to *you*," said Santa Claus. " But I would observe that there is some difference in

our sizes. For me the chimney is exceedingly small. The consequence was that when I'd filled Red Riding Hood's stocking . . ."

"Red Riding Hood is Riding Hood's little daughter. She was christened after her hair."

"Red Riding Hood ?" interrupted Puck. "Who is she ?"

"Red Riding Hood is Riding Hood's little daughter. She was christened after her hair. I wish you wouldn't interrupt, I've lost the thread of my story now."

"Take a deep breath. Say 'Ah' three times, and you'll pick it up again," Puck recommended.

"When I'd filled Red Riding Hood's stocking, I simply could not get back up the chimney. It was a most humiliating experience."

"I suppose you'd been stuffing porridge with the man in the moon," said Puck.

Santa Claus ignored this rude suggestion.

"You may or may not know," he went on severely, "that one of my principles is *never* to waken a boy or a girl. It's a rule I made many hundreds of years ago, and I've never had to break it until last Christmas Eve. But what was I to do ? I had to get back to my reindeer. I couldn't spend the rest of my life half-way up a chimney. I slid back as quietly as I could, but I suppose I was flurried. Anyway, I caught my heel in the top bar of the grate and fell down with a clatter among the fire-irons."

"If you annoy me any more with your idiotic remarks, I'll drive back to Fairy-land without you."

"Pokers and tongs!" laughed the bells of St. John's.

"Kettles and pans!" chuckled the bells of St. Ann's.

As for Puck, he was convulsed with mirth.

"I'd have given my ears to have heard what you said. Ha-ha-ha!"

"I'm not surprised you want to give away your ears," said Santa Claus. "If I had ears like yours, I should want to give them away."

Puck was furious at this; but he could not help admitting to himself that he deserved the retort, and he contented himself with muttering "Bee-vah! Bee-vah!" under his breath, which no doubt you are aware is the Chinese for hairy one.

"When I was on my feet again . . ."

Puck wanted to say that he was surprised to learn that with such big feet as Santa Claus had, he had ever been off them. But he held his tongue.

"When I was on my feet again," the old gentleman went on, "I saw little Red Riding Hood sitting up in bed and looking at me. 'Good-evening, Santa Claus,' said she. 'Good-evening, my little pet,' said I. 'Did you bump yourself very badly?' she asked. 'Hardly at all, my little dear,' I told her. 'But I want you to do something for me,' I said. 'I'll do anything you like, dear Santa Claus,' she promised."

"Sure she didn't say 'reindeer Santa Claus'?" Puck asked.

"Quite sure."

"Then she ought to have," said Puck.

"If you annoy me any more," said Santa Claus, "with your idiotic remarks, I'll drive back to Fairyland without you."

"Pooh!" Puck scoffed. "I've got wings, haven't

I? But go on, I won't interrupt you any more. What did Red Riding Hood do?"

"'I want you to find me a wider chimney,' I asked. 'We haven't got a wider chimney in our house,' she said. 'But there's a trap-door to the roof over the passage outside. Only you will be careful, won't you? because Mother's so dreadfully tired to-night. She fell asleep over her sewing, and I put her to bed most tremendously early.' 'Thank you, my little love,' I said. 'I'll be as quiet as a mouse.'"

"Mice aren't quiet," Puck began, but perceiving that the old gentleman's beard was beginning to bristle with annoyance, he did not continue.

"'And to show you how much I appreciate your kindness,' I said," Santa Claus went on, "'here's the most beautiful doll in my sack.' You know how fond little girls are of dolls, so you can imagine my surprise when Red Riding Hood said, 'If you please, dear Santa Claus, instead of giving me a doll, will you please give Diddle Dumpty, my cat, a saucer of cream. She's so thin, and mother gets so little for the shirts she makes that we simply can't afford to give her any milk, and please, dear Santa Claus, will you give Daddy back to Mother instead of a doll for me?'"

Puck let fall a tear, and, as I suppose you know, fairies' tears are diamonds, so somewhere on the roof of a poor little house in St. Giles' a diamond must be lying to this day. Puck was rather ashamed of his emotion and, in order to hide it, he said to Santa Claus with a pretence at mocking laughter:

"That was an awkward request, when you'd just had her father tossed into the Thames from the top of St. Paul's."

"But she didn't know that," said Santa Claus.

"Did you tell her?"

"No, I hadn't the courage," the old gentleman admitted. "I simply promised I would do my best, and hurried away."

"And you didn't even leave a saucer of cream for the cat?"

"I hadn't got any with me."

"You could have got some from the Milky Way, couldn't you?"

"I never thought of that. In fairness to myself, you must remember that I had thousands of other boys and girls whose wants had to be attended to last Christmas Eve."

"No doubt, no doubt," said Puck, who was feeling delightfully superior. "But you hadn't tossed their fathers into the Thames."

"I don't deny that it's been on my conscience ever since," said Santa Claus. "And that is why I have brought you here to-night. Surely we can do something for poor Mrs. Riding Hood and little Red Riding Hood. My notion was that we could take them back to Banbury. Surely old Mrs. Hubbard would be glad to see her daughter again?"

"I doubt it," said Puck. "Ever since I taught her dog to talk, she's forgotten all about the daughter who ran away to London. Besides, even if she would have her back to live in Tanglewood Cottage, she wouldn't have Diddle Dumpty. Why, that's the cat who was blamed for all my mischief."

Santa Claus looked much depressed.

"I did hope we could have done something," he said. "I thought that Red Riding Hood would be just the little girl you wanted for Banbury Cross. She's as merry and jolly as she can be, and full of good-natured mischief. I could see that in her blue eyes. I'm sure she'd be a match for Jack Horner."

"I wouldn't let any girl-friend of mine marry that sanctimonious little hypocrite," said Puck.

"Not that kind of a match," Santa Claus explained.

"I don't think that you ought to encourage children to play with matches. I don't mind any amount of reasonable mischief, but I draw the line at burning down the village."

"And I don't mean that kind of a match."

"She wouldn't be the other kind of match for Jack Horner if she's got red hair. *His* hair is straw-coloured."

"And I don't mean that kind of a match."

"He hates playing games," said Puck. "So it's no use her challenging him to a cricket match."

"And I don't mean that kind of a match. I mean she'd be too much for him."

"Then you shouldn't pronounce it match."

Santa Claus saw that it was hopeless to argue, and ignored Puck's rebuke.

"Then you don't think we can take them back to Banbury?" he asked sadly.

"I never said that, did I?" Puck replied. "I said she couldn't go and live with her grandmother. But there's a house I've made so uncomfortable for everybody by persistent haunting that it's been empty for years. We can give that to the Hoods, and I'll put a treasure of fairy gold for them in the gold-cellar."

"Puck!" exclaimed Santa Claus, beaming. "You're a brick."

"Brickbats and tiles," said the bells of St. Giles'.

But they weren't really beginning to ring again. They were only agreeing with Santa Claus.

"However," said Santa Claus, "I don't want you to make rash promises, and before we do anything

more in the matter I'd like you to see Red Riding Hood yourself. Will you make yourself invisible, slip down the chimney, and form your own opinion? I'll wait for you up here."

"Slip down a chimney in my best milkskin suit? It would be a soot, not a suit," Puck exclaimed. "What do you take me for, a wretched hobgoblin?"

"But if you're invisible, the soot on your suit would be invisible, too."

"Not when I was visible again," said Puck. "No, no, there's bound to be a hobgoblin in one of those chimneys. I'll call him and send him down to open the door."

Puck went from chimney to chimney, down each of which he made a noise like the singing of a kettle on the hob, but no hobgoblin appeared.

"If I'm not as stupid as a mortal," he exclaimed at last. "Why, it's St. John's Eve. All the hobgoblins in London will be revelling in Kensington Gardens, and not likely to be back till cockcrow. Besides I don't want them, because if there isn't a sprig of St. John's wort pinned over the door, no bar or bolt or lock can keep me out this night, when fairies have most power."

Puck slid down the drain-pipe, and as he didn't come back Santa Claus decided that the Magic Flower had not been pinned above the door, and that the sprite had entered the house.

Puck slid down the drain-pipe.

CHAPTER IV THE RIDING HOODS

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PUCK had entered the tumbledown house in Dull Street, St. Giles, by the keyhole, and he was taken aback at the signs of squalor and poverty that were all around. He had often visited the cottages of humble folk; but, however poor the country cottages might be, there was always in summer the scent of flowers near at hand, the scent of old-fashioned sweetwilliams and pinks and mignonettes blowing in from the garden. Even in the depth of winter, when there were no flowers, there would be the smell of roasting chestnuts, and in autumn the aromatic fumes of bonfires. But here!

"Piff!" he ejaculated. "Why, it's enough to stifle a body. She'll be little White Riding Hood if she stays in this atmosphere much longer. Piff! Ugh!! Yah!!! Faugh!!!! A weasel *would* go pop in air like this."

Puck was on the point of turning round and going back the way he came when from far away at the top of the house he heard the voice of a little girl singing:

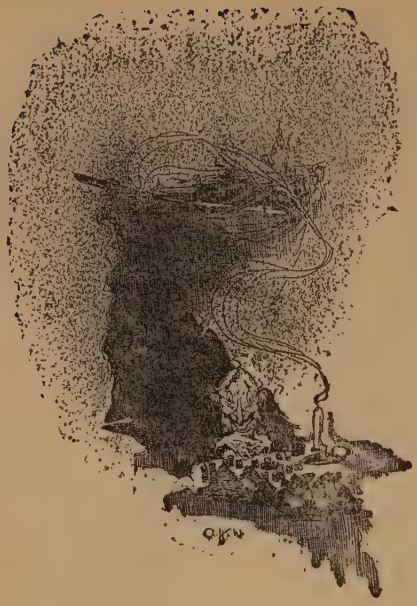
All around the green gravel
The grass grows so green,
And all the pretty maidens are fit to be seen;
Wash them in milk,
Dress them in silk,
And the first to go down, why she shall be queen.
Green gravel! Green gravel! Green gravel!

"Precious little green gravel she'll ever see in St. Giles," Puck thought.

"Brickbats and tiles," the bells murmured softly.

Puck walked gingerly up the narrow stairs, on the walls of which the paper hung in mouldy strips, and as for the banisters . . .

"Why, if a flea jumped on them, they'd fall with a crash," Puck muttered.



"Nyum-nyum-nyum," he said, smacking his lips.

Under the door at the far end of the first landing Puck saw a streak of light, and at once making himself invisible he passed through the keyhole. Red Riding Hood was not here, however; instead there was the landlord of the house, a hooky-beaked old man who was counting his gold, looking up apprehensively all the time, first at the door and then at the windows, which were covered with large dirty blankets.

"A lot of rent due," he was growling to himself. "I'll turn her out if she don't pay me to-morrow. And I'll keep the cat and have it stewed for my supper."

He washed his thin hands in the stream of gold and rubbed them together with an expression of greedy anticipation.

"Nyum-nyum-nyum," he said, smacking his lips.

"Nyum-nyum-nyum," said Puck, boxing his ears.

The old man's terror was really horrible to see. His

teeth chattered; his nose trembled like a leaf; and his fingers clawed at the invisible being that was tormenting him. He shivered so much that his convulsions brought down a large piece of plaster from the cracked ceiling, which set him off shivering worse than ever, so that the outspread gold danced and chinked upon the table. Meanwhile, Puck had retired to the mantelpiece, where he was sitting invisibly regarding the old man with such disapproval that one of his frowns was too deep for his invisibility and appeared all by itself like a—well, really it's rather difficult to say what a frown without a face does look like. You know the furrow a plough makes in the earth? Picture to yourself a furrow in the air, and you will have some idea of Puck's visible frown.

Gradually the miser began to think that his nerves had played him a trick; and Puck, deciding that it was time to get on with his business, flew up to the hole in the ceiling caused by the old man's tremors, whence he easily reached the room above.

Here he saw a poor woman sewing a shirt by the light of a tallow candle and singing a wretched song as she worked. She was not really singing the words, for the song was only in her heart; but Puck, being a fairy, was able to know it, and to know that one day a poet called Thomas Hood would write down the words and make all England listen.

With fingers weary and worn,
With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,
Plying her needle and thread—
Stitch! Stitch! Stitch!
In poverty, hunger and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang 'The Song of the Shirt.'

'*The Song of the Shirt.*'

Work—work—work!
From weary chime to chime,
Work—work—work!
As prisoners work for crime!
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Till the heart is sick and the brain benumb'd,
As well as the weary hand.

Oh! but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet—
With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet,
For only one short hour
To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want
And the walk that costs a meal.

There were many other verses, each sadder than the last; but I do not want to make you feel too sad, because this is not meant to be a sad story. I can assure you that Puck did not feel the least inclination to play any tricks on poor Mrs. Riding Hood. He was just considering the idea of making himself visible so as to console her with a promise that she should have much more than one short hour in the country where she had lived as a girl, when the door opened gently and a little girl of about ten, with glorious red hair, but oh, with such a pale, thin face, came into the room.

"Mother," she said, "must you work any more to-night? You look so tired, darling, so dreadfully tired, and you haven't stopped working all day. Perhaps Daddy will come back to-morrow, and then you wouldn't have to work so hard. Or would you?"

Mrs. Riding Hood smiled sadly.

"I'm afraid that even if your Daddy came back, I

Fairy wings had been tickling her whiskers all the evening.

should still have to work. We must live, you know, and it takes very many shirts just to keep you alive, my little girl. And to-night I must work extra hard because we have to pay some of the rent we owe to our landlord. He has threatened to turn us out if we can't pay."

"Perhaps if I went downstairs and asked him very nicely to let us stay, he would."

"I'd like to hear him say he wouldn't," Puck exclaimed.

"What did you say, Mother?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"I didn't speak, darling."

"I thought I heard a voice, a funny hoarse little voice," said Red Riding Hood, looking round her. "I didn't think it was your voice, but there's only you and me in the room, so I thought it must be you talking perhaps in rather a tired little voice."

"No, darling, I said nothing."

"How very astraordinary!" said Red Riding Hood. "It must have been a fairy."

"Fairies don't often visit St. Giles," said Mrs. Riding Hood.

"Well, I was talking to Diddle Dumpty to-night, and she was sure that fairy wings had been tickling her whiskers all the evening. Poor Diddle, she's most dreadfully hungry, and she says she wishes now that

she'd never left Banbury Cross. We were singing *Green Gravel* together."

"Were you feeling so cheerful as that?" Mrs. Riding Hood asked.

"No, I wasn't feeling at all cheerful, but if I'm terribly hungry I feel better if I sing. It keeps away the giddiness."

Mrs. Riding Hood put down her sewing for a moment and caught her little girl to her arms.

"My darling, mother is working as hard as she can, and if only I can finish these shirts I promise you that you shall have some dinner to-morrow. The rent will have to wait."

"Oh, the rent will have to wait, will it?" a harsh voice interrupted.

In the doorway stood the threatening figure of Mr. Grudge, the miserly landlord.

"The rent will have to wait, will it?" he repeated, shaking his skinny fist. "We'll see about that. I'll turn you out in the street, do you hear? Yes, if you don't pay me every farthing, I'll turn you out and seize your cat."

"Diddle Dumpty! Diddle Dumpty!" shrieked Red Riding Hood. "Escape before Mr. Grudge catches you. Oh, Diddle Dumpty, do escape and ask somebody to show you the way to the nearest plum-tree. And if you can manage to run up it, oh, do try to run up it."

The miser began to sing in a kind of skeleton voice:

Diddle-diddle-dumpty,
The cat ran up the plum-tree.
Ha—ha—ha—ha!
Give her a plum and down she'll come,
Diddle—diddle—dumpty.

A dear old lady in a high steeple-hat.

"You hear what he says?" Red Riding Hood screamed.

"Me-ow-yes! Me-ow-yes!" came back from the end of the passage.

"Don't accept any plums from anybody."

"Me-ow-no! Me-ow-no!"

"I'll lay you a crown, I'll fetch you down," Mr. Grudge threatened fiercely.

The situation was getting too much for Puck. He really was not used to such sensational events. Living quietly, as he did, in the country, these London atrocities appalled him. Forgetting all about his milkskin suit, he flew up the chimney to ask Santa Claus what was to be done. There was the old gentleman leaning comfortably back against a chimney-stack and talking to a dear old lady in a high steeple-hat.

"Good-evening, Mother Goose," said Puck politely, for the old lady, who was a good witch, what is known as a white witch, was much respected in Fairyland.

"I've been taking a little fly round to get cool," said Mother Goose. "What lovely weather for the revels! Dear me, I often wish I was a girl again. I hear that our old friend Santa Claus has found a charming little girl among the brickbats and tiles of dirty dreary old St. Giles. And that you're thinking of taking her back to Banbury Cross. I quite approve, Puck. If Her Majesty interferes, please say that Mother Goose quite approves."

"I certainly will, Your Maternity," said Puck, making a low bow. "I'm sorry to interrupt Your Maternity's conversation, but all sorts of things are happening underneath where we are standing. A vile old miser threatens to turn the poor Riding Hoods into the street if they feed themselves instead of paying the rent. Not only that, but the hard-hearted old beast intends to seize Diddle Dumpty the cat. Red Riding Hood, with great presence of mind, told her to run up the nearest plum-tree, but it seems to me more than doubtful if, in her present weak state, the poor cat will get as far. What is to be done?"

Mother Goose stood up and waved her broom majestically.

"I have long intended to give Mr. Grudge a lesson," she said. "This seems the moment. Puck, if you will go back into the house, I think I can promise you a very diverting few minutes."

"What are you going to do?" asked Puck.

"Wait and see," said Mother Goose. "You had better go back and look after Red Riding Hood. There's no knowing what that old ruffian will be up to."

Puck hurried back down the chimney and found that poor Diddle Dumpty had after all been unable to escape, and that the cruel old miser had locked her up

in a cupboard. He was dancing about the room with an expression of disagreeable triumph, singing in a dreadful voice:

A.B.C., tumble-down D.
The cat's in the cupboard and can't see me.

When Red Riding Hood picked up a poker to rescue her cat, Mr. Grudge stopped dancing and began to roll up his sleeves.

"Into the street you'll both go," he declared.

"Have mercy, have mercy," Mrs. Riding Hood implored.

"It's no good praying to me," said the old man, "I don't believe in prayers."

He had no sooner uttered these words than there was the sound of a most extraordinary footstep on the stairs. Up it came, flop-flap! plosh-plash! and then down it went, flap-flop! plash-plosh!

"Who's that walking about my house?" Mr. Grudge demanded.

Down the chimney came a queer cackling voice:

Goosey-goosey gander,
Whither dost thou wander?

The old man stood petrified with fear.

"It's the voice of Mother Goose," he whispered.

"Me-ow! me-ow!" cried Diddle Dumpty from the cupboard in a muffled voice, which, however, was full of hope.

From below came an answering voice, a very deep quacking voice:

Upstairs and downstairs.

Then the footsteps began again, flip-flop-flap!

plush-plash-plosh! and suddenly the whole doorway was occupied by a very fine gander.

And in my lady's chamber, he quacked.

"Take him by the left leg
And throw him down the stairs!"

Down the chimney came the cackling voice of his mistress :

There you'll find an old man
Who will not say his prayers.

" Quack-quack ! " said the great gander.

Take him by the left leg
And throw him down the stairs !

the voice from the chimney sternly commanded. Without a moment's hesitation the mighty gander put down his neck, opened his great yellow beak, seized Mr. Grudge by the left leg, picked him up, and . . .

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CHAPTER V MOTHER GOOSE

CHAPTER V MOTHER GOOSE

THE first thing that Red Hiding Hood did when Mr. Grudge had been thrown downstairs by Goosey Gander was to run to the cupboard and let out Diddle Dumpty the cat.

And while Diddle Dumpty is rubbing herself against her little mistress, so much overcome by the emotion of finding herself free again that she does not know whether to miaow or purr, and so in the end produces a curious mixture of both, something like 'priaow,' while Diddle Dumpty is doing this and Puck is deciding how to make himself visible without frightening everybody over again worse than ever, and while Mrs. Riding Hood is torn between her anxiety to show friendliness and gratitude to Goosey Gander and her anxiety to prevent his gobbling up the shirts she has just made with so much trouble—while all this is going on, I think it is a good opportunity to explain exactly how Diddle Dumpty ever came to live with Red Riding Hood.

She was a tabby cat who formerly lived in Banbury Gay with Mrs. Dumpty. Lots of people in the village thought that Mrs. Dumpty was a witch, because her only son Humpty was such an extraordinary boy to look at that they said she must have given away her own child to Puck and got Humpty in exchange. There wasn't anything much the matter with poor Humpty except his fatness and his habit of sitting on walls and saying "Boo!" suddenly when nervous old ladies were walking below. However, when Jack Horner came to live in Banbury Gay and made all the children so good that Puck took it upon himself to get up to all sorts of mischief in the night, such as filling people's shoes with sand and putting tadpoles in the milk, everybody blamed Humpty Dumpty. He and his mother were banished from the village,

Hannah Bantry in the pantry
Eating a mutton bone;
How she gnawed it,
how she clawed it,
When she found she was alone!

and had to live under a hill in a house without walls. Diddle resented this very much because she liked walking on walls as much as Humpty liked sitting on them. Puck did not stop his mischief, and now that people could not possibly blame either Humpty or Mrs. Dumpty they began to blame the Dumptys' cat.

There was

Hannah Bantry in the pantry
Eating a mutton bone;
How she gnawed it, how she clawed it,
When she found she was alone!

But when her master, Mr. Tucker, blamed her for being so greedy, she declared it was the cat.

Then there was Telltale, the son of Mrs. Tit, who went about singing:

Dingty Diddlety, my mammy's maid,
She stole oranges, I'm afraid;
Some in her pocket, some in her sleeve,
She stole oranges, I do believe.

Well, people got mixed up between Dingty Diddlety, the Tits' maid, and Diddle Dumpty, the Dumptys' cat; and in the end the cat was accused of stealing oranges. When they chased her and she ran up a plum-tree as usual, of course everybody said: "There you are, that cat's got a perfect passion for fruit."

Things in Banbury went from bad to worse. Even the houses, instead of smiling as they used, had the

Even the houses, instead of smiling as they used, had the most horrible expressions.

most horrible expressions, so that far and wide the village was now called Banbury Cross, and those who attributed everything to the witchcraft of Mrs. Dumpty said that Banbury Cross was in the dumps and no mistake. Then one day the Bunting baby was put to sleep by a careless nurse-maid on a tree-top. At first it was all right, because so long as the wind blew gently the cradle merely rocked gently; but when it blew a gale, the bough broke, the cradle fell, and down came the baby, the cradle, and all. Of course, once more it was the cat. Then another baby was bitten by a gnat, and when the story was repeated everybody had to improve on it by saying it had been

bitten by the cat. Finally, when the man in the moon burnt his mouth with porridge and the moon went black in the face in consequence, although people couldn't accuse the poor cat of that, they accused Mrs. Dumpty of trying to drag the moon down from the skies, because in some parts of the world witches do manage to drag down the moon, and I want you not to forget that, for later on in my history you'll hear more about such tricks being played on the moon. Diddle Dumpty certainly had nothing to do with the moon's fit, as it was called, because she had kittens at the time, but people were so unfair that they sent all her kittens away to St. Paul's. Soon after this the village of Gotham challenged the village of Banbury to a whist tournament, and won. Everybody became gloomier than ever and sang this song:

We're all in the dumps,
For diamonds are trumps,
The kittens are gone to St. Paul's,
The babies are bit,
The moon's in a fit,
And the houses are built without walls.

It was too much for Diddle Dumpty. She put on her boots and set out for London to complain about the situation to the Queen. Unfortunately the Queen was frightened of mice, and what should Diddle Dumpty do the moment she arrived at the palace but kill a mouse under the Queen's chair. I need hardly say that the King was furious, and ordered Diddle Dumpty to leave the palace immediately.

"King Cole wouldn't have treated me like this," said Diddle Dumpty rather tactlessly, for kings don't like odious comparisons.

"Leave the palace!" the King shouted. "And don't sit there staring at me."

"Pooh!" Diddle Dumpty growled. "A cat may look at a king."

Whereupon she kicked off her boots to show her contempt for royalty, and ran out of the palace. It is all very well to show your independence when you can afford to, but poor Diddle Dumpty soon found that she couldn't afford to be independent. Nobody she asked knew anything of her kittens' whereabouts; and as for the bells of St. Paul's, they merely replied, 'Shirts, sherry, and shawls!' when she enquired of them about her kittens, and you must admit that this was not a very helpful answer. She began to wish that she had never left Banbury, however cross it was, and she wished bitterly that she had not kicked off her boots to show her independence. It would take another book as long as this to tell you the various adventures of Diddle Dumpty when she came to London to see the Queen. And anyway, I daresay you want to get back to Red Riding Hood, who after all is the heroine and deserves a little attention. To cut a long story short, our heroine found Diddle Dumpty on the parapet of the bridge over the Serpentine about to put an end to her misery by drowning herself. Friendship and affection were what Diddle Dumpty required more than food, and she showed her appreciation of her little mistress by never once miaowing for milk that she knew it was impossible for her to buy. It did not matter how dry and mouldy

She began to wish that she had never left Banbury.

the crust, she would purr over it as if it was the breast of a plump and succulent partridge.

You can imagine what a joy it was to Diddle Dumpty to think that Red Riding Hood had found such powerful allies as Puck, Santa Claus, and Mother Goose, for though Red Riding Hood herself did not realise who had befriended her, Diddle Dumpty knew and whispered to her:

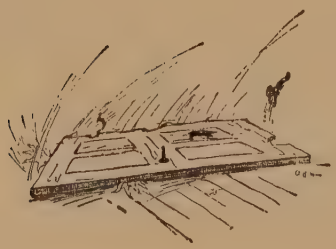
"Miaoyour miaortune's miaowade."

Can you read cats' language? It takes a little practice, but it really isn't half as difficult as French.

By this time Puck had made himself visible, and Red Riding Hood, when she saw him perched on the back of a crazy kitchen chair, clapped her hands with delight. As for Mrs. Riding Hood, she hardly knew how to warn so distinguished a visitor from Fairyland of the danger of the chair's collapse. While she was bobbing and curtseying, Goosey Gander was gobbling up her shirts as fast as he could.

"Have you thrown him down the stairs?" came that queer cackling voice down the chimney.

"Quack-quack!" said Goosey Gander, waddling over to the fireplace and putting his long neck right up the chimney to answer his mistress.



"Good boy!" said the voice.

"Quack-quack-quack-quack," said Goosey Gander, flapping his wings with pleasure at the praise. He made such a terrible wind by doing this that both the windows of the room were blown out into the street and fell with a crash upon the pavement below. Not only that, but the door came off its hinges, hurtled along the passage, and, as I believe, flattened out Mr. Grudge just as he was trying to pick himself up downstairs. Perhaps it was as well that Goosey Gander did make a good meal off Mrs. Riding Hood's shirts, because otherwise they would certainly have been blown away, and that would have been a real waste of the poor woman's time.

Even Puck was rather taken aback by the whirlwind and asked Goosey Gander what he thought he was doing. Of course there was no real danger of Puck's being blown away, but nevertheless he had to battle with his wings against the tempest, and I think he found his position on the back of the chair a little undignified. In fact, he looked uncommonly like a parrot fluttering on the perch when his cage is moved too quickly by the maid.

"There's a tremendous draught coming up the chimney," Mother Goose called down.

Goosey Gander gave a subdued quack of assent, and hurriedly folded his wings.

"The window was quack-racked already," he said.

"You'd better bring Mrs. Riding Hood and little Red Riding Hood up on the roof," Mother Goose advised. "Tell them to get on your back."

"Quick-quack!" said Goosey-Gander. "Back-quack!"

"Quack-smack! Quack-whack! That's what you deserve," said Puck crossly.

Circled St. Giles' steeple three times.

"Oh, please don't be angry with him," Red Riding Hood begged. "He was so brave with Mr. Grudge."

"It was such a quack-lack of manners," said Puck severely.

However, Puck's annoyance was soon forgotten in the difficulty of persuading Mrs. Riding Hood to mount the gander.

"You've often ridden pig-a-back, haven't you?" Puck asked. "Well it's just as easy to ride goose-a-back."

"But I haven't ridden pig-a-back since I was a little girl," Mrs. Riding Hood protested.

At this moment Mr. Grudge, who having been flattened by the door had now swelled up to twice his natural size, called out:

"I'll have the law on them. They'll go to prison for this!"

Mrs. Riding Hood turned as white as one of her shirts.

"He's on your track-quack," Goosey Gander cackled.

This was too much for Mrs. Riding Hood. She scrambled up. So did Red Riding Hood. So did Diddle Dumpty. And with Puck hanging to his tail feathers the great gander spread his wings, flew through the blown-out side of the house, circled St. Giles' steeple three times, and finally alighted on the roof where Santa Claus and Mother Goose were waiting to welcome them. Evidently the two old people had been discussing the future together, for without ado Mother Goose began:

"Puck, I understand that you are anxious for these two worthy mortals to live in Banbury?"

"Most anxious, Your Maternity," said Puck. "I

Mother Goose had a house,
'Twas built in a wood,
Where an owl at the door
As sentinel stood.

have a beautiful empty house in the best part of the village green which I have been haunting for some years now. The cellar is full of fairy gold. The cupboards are well stocked with fairy loaves. . . ."

"I do not doubt that the house is suitable in every respect," Mother Goose interrupted. "And I propose

to take Mrs. Riding Hood back to Banbury with me to-night."

"Back-quack," Goosey Gander cackled, preening all his feathers.

"Did I invite your opinion?" his mistress asked severely.

"Back to Banbury with me to-night," the old lady resumed. "But—and this is a very big BUT,—a five-hundred-gallon BUT—you know quite well, Puck, that before you introduce Red Riding Hood to the village, she should be presented at the court of Queen Titania. My old friend, Santa Claus, tells me that you deliberately avoided the revels to-night in order to go with him. If the Queen is given an opportunity of seeing Red Riding Hood, I have no doubt that she will be graciously pleased to overlook your rudeness and that she will no longer throw any obstacles in the way of your plans for the future. In a word, I consider this presentation imperative. Therefore, my little girl, please kiss your mother good-bye for a day or two and make up your mind to spend a short time at the court of Queen Titania. Be on your pleasantest behaviour. Make yourself useful to Her Majesty in any way you can. I will look after your mother. In fact, I have changed my mind about taking her to Banbury to-night. I think she requires a complete rest, and you'll remember:

Mother Goose had a house,
'Twas built in a wood,
Where an owl at the door
As sentinel stood.

"She will be my guest for as long as Queen Titania requires your presence at the Fairy Court."

Neither Red Riding Hood nor her mother felt that

she ought to do anything more than curtsey her willingness to obey the old lady's commands.

" Dear Santa Claus, I am so glad to see you again."

" Please, Your Maternity," the little girl asked timidly, " what will become of Diddle Dumpty ? "

" She will go to sea with my owl for a short voyage in a pea-green boat," Mother Goose announced.

"Miaowno! miaowno!" protested Diddle Dumpty, who did not at all like this proposal.

"What a most unmusical voice," Mother Goose exclaimed. "This cat must be taught mewsic. She shall come with me and learn the fiddle."

Diddle Dumpty purred with pleasure at the prospect, for though she did not like leaving her young mistress she realised what an advantage it would give her over other cats if she could play the fiddle.

During these arrangements Santa Claus had kept in the background, but now he stepped forward and greeted his little friend.

"Dear Santa Claus," she said, "I am so glad to see you again. I shall always remember how kind you were to bring Puck and Mother Goose to take care of us."

"Well," said Santa Claus, who, like most kind-hearted people, felt very much embarrassed when he was being thanked, "Come along, we ought to be getting back. I shan't sleep to-night until I know that you are safe in Fairyland and that Queen Titania has taken you under her special protection. Are you ready, Mother Goose?"

"Quite ready, Claus," she replied. "Up with you, Mrs. Riding Hood. We go most of the way together."

Puck was feeling that matters had been rather taken out of his wings. However, since he was really anxious to make Banbury Cross Banbury Gay once more, he decided not to sulk.

"Jump into the sleigh beside me," he told Red Riding Hood.

In another moment the twenty-four reindeer were bounding through the sapphire air of the midsummer night. Presently Mother Goose drove away to the left on Goosey Gander, and Red Riding Hood blew

kisses of farewell that, because she was travelling in an enchanted sleigh, shone like shooting-stars on their path to her mother's heart. From far below ascended the faint quackings of delight with which all the goslings of Mother Goose welcomed her home.

"In another second we shall be in Fairyland," Puck proclaimed.

"How near Fairyland is!" said Red Riding Hood in astonishment.

"Very near," Santa Claus chuckled, "if people only knew the way. Gently, deer, gently. Down, down."

The sleigh sank rapidly, and a moment later Red Riding Hood found herself on a soft bank sweet with wild thyme.

CHAPTER VI THE COCK-HORSE

CHAPTER VI THE COCK-HORSE

PERHAPS some little girls who read this story will want to know what Queen Titania said to Red Riding Hood and what Red Riding Hood said to Queen Titania on that bank of wild thyme; but unfortunately nobody who visits Fairyland ever remembers exactly where the visit happened, when the visit happened, how the visit happened, and what actually did happen during the visit. You just fade away into wild thyme, and there you are! To be sure, I have heard that if, when you're telling the time by dandelion clocks, you can catch hold of the last feathery seed puffed away, you can puff yourself into Fairy Time; I have heard too, that if you can catch your shadow, your shadow will show you the way. But, as you know:

If 'ifs' and 'ans'
Were pots and pans,
There'd be no need for tinkers.

Nor is it any use wishing, for:

If wishes were horses,
Beggars would ride;
If turnips were watches,
I'd wear one by my side.

Of course, we do know a little about Fairyland; but what secrets have leaked out have only done so by accident. Many, many little girls and a few little boys have got up before sunrise, washed their faces with dew, and seen the Fairies; but the trouble is that by the time they grow up and want to write about their adventures in a book they have forgotten nearly all that happened. Even I, who have talked for hours at a time to Puck, cannot tell you much about Fairyland itself, for although I have been lucky enough to be of some service to him more than once, he has never

Diddle Dumpty was already able to do quite difficult five-claw exercises on the fiddle.

been able to secure me an audience of Oberon or Titania. So, please don't grumble because I can't tell you what Red Riding Hood said to the Fairy Queen, and pray be content with what I can tell you about Red Riding Hood's adventures in Banbury Cross. I shouldn't be able to tell you anything about these adventures if I had not once upon a time gone to tea every afternoon with two well-informed witches, and heard from them the whole history.

By the way, I can give you one small piece of information. You can easily find out where the Fairies sleep if you can find out where the moonbeams go at dawn, for both my witch friends told me that the Fairies wrap themselves in moonbeams every morning. What is more, I have the pleasure of being able to announce that, if you can find out where the sunbeams go at dusk, you will even be able to see the Fairies in dark December, for these two friendly sorceresses were able to assure me that most of the old sunbeams are made up into warm suits for such Fairies as have to work in Winter. The loveliest of them, however, sleep until Spring, and they do not wake until the early bee buzzes to them that the willows are in bud and the celandines shining in the fields.

Anyway, whatever happened to Red Riding Hood in Fairyland, she certainly made a most favourable impression on Titania, because as soon as Mother Goose was able to report that Mrs. Riding Hood was thoroughly rested, and that Diddle Dumpty was already able to do quite difficult five-claw exercises on the fiddle, everything was arranged by the Fairies to make Red Riding Hood's arrival in Banbury Cross as impressive as possible.

Ride a cock-horse to Banbury Cross,
To see a fine lady upon a white horse ;
Rings on her fingers and bells on her toes,
She shall have music wherever she goes.

I may as well tell you here that all the pictures of cock-horses are wrong, because in none of those that I have seen are the horses painted with wings. Now *all* cock-horses have wings. There was a very famous one called Pegasus, whom your father will know all about. Ask him. I haven't time to tell you myself. And ask him how to spell Bellerophon, who was the hero that rode it. You can read about another cock-horse in the 'Arabian Nights,' and about another in Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales,' though that was supposed to be made of brass, which I don't believe.

The best breed of cock-horses is snow-white and comes from the North Pole. But these Polar horses are as difficult to catch and as difficult to tame as the white horses of Neptune that gallop over the sea. Santa Claus was used to breaking in reindeer, and he taught Red Riding Hood how to mount hers. Even ordinary horses are very contrary animals and always say "nay" instead of "yes," while cock-horses, instead of saying "cock-a-doodle-doo," always say "cock-a-doodle-don't." However, this particular

cock-horse was very affable and said he did not at all mind leaving the hen-horse and all the little chicken-horses for a few hours. And now about the bells on Red Riding Hood's toes. You must not imagine that those bells were ringing, because the song says clearly that the rings were on her fingers. It is obvious that the rings on her fingers could not have been ringing without the bells on her toes, and it is even more obvious that the bells on her toes could not have been ringing without the rings that were on her fingers. So I don't think that Red Riding Hood made her own music wherever she went. I should be inclined to believe it was fairy music that only she could hear. In addition to the beautiful white cock-horse on which she rode, Queen Titania gave her a red hood to ride in, a lovely hood woven from the hairs of woolly-bear caterpillars and dyed with poppies and pimpernels to the colour of a caterpillar-box. We call them pillar-boxes now. They were originally painted red, because all letters used to be red—well, of course, they're written to be read, aren't they ?—and that's why we talk about red-letter days.

On the threshold of Fairyland Santa Claus and Puck said good-bye to their little friend.

"I shall be passing your way again at Christmas," said Santa Claus. "I shall be travelling North in a few days' time, and I shall have all my work cut out to get the toys ready in time."

"Good-bye, dear Santa Claus," said Red Riding Hood. "And thank you ever so much for all your kindness to Mother and me."

"You must thank Puck most," said Santa Claus.

"You'll hear of me, Red Riding Hood," said Puck. "And though you're not likely to see me very often, I shall be there. Remember, I count on you to make

The white cock-horse spread his wings and flew from Fairyland through Airyland to Banbury.

Banbury Cross Banbury Gay once more. Don't bother about the grown-ups. You can't do anything with grown-ups. They're hopeless. Good-bye, Red Riding Hood. And don't forget always to be a bad little girl."

At these words the white cock-horse spread his wings and flew from Fairyland through Airyland to Banbury. By the way, I forgot to explain that when Puck told Red Riding Hood to be bad, he did not

mean horridly bad, but just jolly. You must remember that Jack Horner had been going about all the time saying 'What a good boy am I!' and got so much cake out of grown-ups in consequence that the children of Banbury, in order to get cakes, had all become horridly good, and it's every bit as easy, and almost more unpleasant, to be horridly good than to be horridly bad.

CHAPTER VII WOODBINE COTTAGE

THE village of Banbury Cross lay at the end of a long white road, with the high green hill called Pippen Hill beside it and a huge forest all round. Each cottage had its own garden. Twelve lily-white ducks were swimming on the village pond, and twelve grey geese were marching up and down the village green. The big house in one corner belonged to Doctor Foster, and the big house in the other corner belonged to Farmer Muffet. At a first glance Banbury looked the most delightful place in England, but wayfarers who passed that way and hurried along expecting to find good beer and good cheer at that famous old inn *The Three Jolly Pigeons* were discouraged when they found that the sign was now *The Three Pouting Pigeons*, and that the innkeeper, James Porgie, instead of being licensed to sell wines, spirits, beers and tobacco, was only licensed to sell whines, low spirits, tears, and tobacc-oh! They began to realize that with all its prettiness Banbury was a sad and silent village, for they would see nobody in sight except gloomy old Mr. Daw the sexton, shuffling along to toll the cracked bell in the church tower. They would begin to notice that all the houses and cottages looked extremely cross. Such ruffled thatches, such sulky doors, such frowning windows, such wrinkled tiles, such scowling eaves! There was not one house nor one cottage in the whole village that had a pleasant expression. Yes, there was one, a tumbledown old cottage covered with ivy, quite the most disreputable cottage in the village, but the only one that did not look disagreeable. And it was by the gate of that cottage, among a crowd of beaming sunflowers, that Mrs. Riding Hood waited to welcome her little daughter back from Fairyland this sunny summer day. The visit to Mother Goose

had done her so much good that she was looking scarcely any older than her little daughter.

"Darling!" she cried, as Red Riding Hood jumped off the cock-horse and ran to kiss her mother.

"Mother, I've had such a lovely time!"

"Have you, darling? And what did you do, and what did you see?"

"Why, Mother!" Red Riding Hood exclaimed, opening wide her blue eyes in bewilderment, "I can't remember. Didn't I fly here somehow?"

"No, dearest," said her mother, "you came walking along the road just like any other little girl."

"But hark, Mother! Can't you hear the fairy music? It's everywhere! I hear it wherever I go."

"I can only hear Diddle Dumpty playing upon her fiddle," said Mrs. Riding Hood.

At that moment Diddle Dumpty came dancing sideways out of the cottage to greet her mistress.

"Purr have you been? Oh, I am so purry glad to mee-ow-you again," said Diddle Dumpty.

I hope you're getting on with this cat language, because it will help you very much when you have to learn other animal languages. Catin is to animals what Latin is to human beings.

"And now come in and see what a beautiful house our kind friends have given us," Mrs. Riding Hood said, leading the way proudly into Woodbine Cottage.

It was certainly very different inside from what it had seemed outside. Puck, who had been haunting it so long, had naturally not bothered to make it look smart outside. In fact, he scarcely ever saw it from outside, because he had a secret passage down a rabbit-burrow in Fairyland up into the cellar of Woodbine Cottage. Most people would have declared that it was a rat's hole; but Red Riding Hood did

not think it was a rat's hole, for when she knelt down and put her ear close she could hear more clearly than ever the sound of fairy music. By the way, I don't recommend any of you to start listening for fairy music down rat-holes. The trouble with most things is that they really are what they seem.

She could hear more clearly than ever the sound of fairy music.

Woodbine Cottage, in addition to the cellar, had two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. I can't tell you how delighted Red Riding Hood was with her own room ; and she had good reason to be, for Puck himself, with advice from Santa Claus, had prepared it for her. To begin with, the ceiling had all sorts of queer corners and angles, and here and there it actually touched the floor. This ceiling was never a dull, ugly white like so many ceilings, except in the daytime, when, after all, nobody wants a bedroom ceiling to be entertaining. At sunrise it was full of golden shapes, and at sunset it was flickering with rosy shadows, and by candlelight it was alive with shapes and shadows of every colour and size imaginable. In the morning, when Red Riding Hood was lying in bed awake before it was time to dress, golden birds and golden butterflies flitted across it, golden coins were heaped up here and there, and golden dancers bobbed and nodded and bowed to one another. At night, when Red Riding Hood was going to bed by candlelight, sometimes she was in a beautiful ballroom surrounded by guests in rich attire, and sometimes she was in a kind of enchanted zoo where

Could walk for hours in her wallpaper.

stately griffins begged for buns, unicorns could be stroked and patted on the nose, and a purple phœnix would peck at the caraway seeds she had carried away from her cake at tea. But when the moon was full, the ceiling became a wonder ceiling, just as the landing between the two bedrooms became a wonder landing. Red Riding Hood's bed turned into a boat in which she sailed over dim blue waters among the silver mermaids and friendly black fish that inhabited this wonder sea.

Then there was the wallpaper. I don't believe that there ever was such an interesting wallpaper. You know how when you take a walk in most wallpapers, you always come back to the same flowers or the same trees or the same birds. Well, Red Riding Hood could walk for hours in her wallpaper, yes, and what's more, very nearly lose herself sometimes, so that she would have quite a difficult job to find her way back to bed.

Then there were the curtains. You can imagine what a pleasure it was to pull curtains in which all the flowers smelt even more sweetly than real flowers. But if I were to tell you about all the jolly things in Red Riding Hood's bedroom, I should never get on with this tale, and you would never get up to your bedroom, which, for all I know, may be just as wonderful as Red Riding Hood's.

Red Riding Hood did not care for the tiny little parlour downstairs so much as she cared for the kitchen, which was as cosy a kitchen as can be, with a kettle on the hob that would sing solos to the accompaniment of Diddle Dumpty's fiddle, and not only solos, but sohighs as well. Nevertheless, the parlour, which smelt of nuts, apples, and lavender, was a very pleasant little room, where Red Riding Hood and her mother used to sit on warm Sunday evenings in summer, after they had spent the afternoon in the shade of the plum-tree that grew in their little garden.

"And now, Mother," said Red Riding Hood on the day she arrived in Banbury Cross from Fairyland, "tell me what you have been doing while I have been away?"

Mrs. Riding Hood folded her apron across her lap and sat down in a specially comfortable armchair to

give her little daughter an account of her adventures.

"Well, dear child, when you went off in the sleigh to Fairyland, Goosey Gander brought us safely down to the wood where his mistress lives."

"What kind of a house is it?"

"It's a very comfortable little egg-shaped house lined throughout with goosedown," said Mrs. Riding Hood. "The snuggest and cosiest house you can imagine, and the sentinel owl, whose name is Oliver, is the kindest of birds. I was afraid he would peck Diddle Dumpty; but they made friends almost at once, and used to have long talks together about mouse-hunting."

"Was it the owl who taught Diddle Dumpty to play the fiddle?"

"Yes, it was Oliver who taught her."

There was an owl lived in an oak,
Wisky, wasky, weedle;
And every word he ever spoke
Was fiddle, faddle, feedle.

"She was a very apt pupil, and, of course, with claws like hers, you can imagine that she had no difficulty at all with the sharps. But I must go on with my own adventures. When I was thoroughly rested, Mother Goose asked if I would like to go and visit my mother in Tanglewood Coppice."

"Visit Grannie?" Red Riding Hood cried. "Oh, Mother darling, how exciting! And wasn't she frightfully glad to see you?

"Yes, but she has been very much worried lately about her little dog Buff. He's been so good for such a long time now that Mother thinks there must be something the matter with him."

"Was Buff nice to Diddle Dumpty?"

"Very polite indeed. No dog could have been more polite."

A dog and a cat went out together
To see some friends just out of the town;
Said the cat to the dog,
"What d'ye think of the weather?"
"I think, ma'am, the rain will come down—
But, don't be alarmed, for I've an umbrella
That will shelter us both," said the amiable fellow.

"And what did Grannie say about me?" Red Riding Hood asked, for, like most little girls, she thought a good deal about what people said about her. "What did she say about my going to visit the Fairy Queen?"

"She hoped you would spend an enjoyable few days," said Mrs. Riding Hood. "And I promised that as soon as you came back I would take the first opportunity of sending you to pay her a visit. Dear me, it seems only yesterday that I myself was a little girl of your age."

"And shall I be able to go and see Mother Goose, too?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"Perhaps Diddle Dumpty will be able to take you there," said her mother.

"Purrhaps I mayow," said Diddle Dumpty.

"But you must wait for the holidays to visit Mother Goose, who lives much farther off than Grandmother. Mistress Contrary has kindly allowed you to join her school in the middle of term, and this afternoon at four o'clock she will interview you."

Red Riding Hood thought that this sounded

alarming, but she was anxious to see the village children whose goodness had so much upset Puck.

At a few minutes to four she and her mother left Diddle Dumpty to play the kettle's accompaniment while they went to visit Mistress Contrary before tea

" It seems only yesterday that I myself was a little girl of your age."

CHAPTER VIII BANBURY CROSS

CHAPTER VIII · BANBURY CROSS

THE first house in the village at which Red Riding Hood and her mother stopped for a moment belonged to Mr. Gregory Griggs the barber. I suppose you all know that

Gregory Griggs, Gregory Griggs,
Had twenty-seven different wigs.
He wore them up ; he wore them down,
To please the people of the town ;
He wore them East, he wore them West,
But he never could tell which he liked best.

When the children of Banbury became so good and at the same time their parents so sad and the houses so cross, the village Maypole was taken down, because nobody wanted to dance any more ; and Mr. Griggs now used it as a barber's pole.

"Why do barbers have poles, mother ?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"Why do barbers have poles ?" exclaimed a fussy little man, running out of his shop door. "All people have polls ; and if people did not have polls, barbers would not have poles, would they ?"

Red Riding Hood did not think that she cared much for Mr. Griggs. To begin with, his twenty-seven wigs made him look terribly hot on this summer day, and of course it is very difficult to get twenty-seven different wigs unless you collect all sorts of extraordinary colours. The wig he was wearing on his head was emerald green. He had an orange wig on one hand and a purple wig on the other hand ; on his right foot he wore a peacock-blue wig, and on his left foot he wore a scarlet wig. He had an auburn wig on one shoulder and a black wig on the other shoulder ; two or three different shades of grey wigs on his back, and a white wig on his chin. He had a Vandyke

He began rearranging all his wigs.

brown wig, an indigo wig, a raw sienna wig, a burnt sienna wig, a crimson lake wig, a vermilion wig, a green bice wig, a yellow ochre wig, a carmine wig, a magenta wig, an aquamarine wig, a gamboge wig, a puce wig, a mauve wig, a saffron wig, and an ultramarine wig. Not only was he wearing wigs himself, but his cottage, instead of being thatched like other cottages with straw, was thatched with hair.

"Which way do you like my wigs best?" he asked Red Riding Hood.

"I really don't know," said Red Riding Hood as politely as she could.

"Nor do I," Gregory Griggs sighed. "It really is most depressing." And then he began rearranging all his wigs.

Presently he was accosted by a man dressed in brown, who was leading a pig:

Barber, barber, shave a pig,
How many hairs to make a wig?

Four-and-twenty, that's enough, said Mr. Griggs.
Here the pig broke in:

Give the barber a pinch of snuff.

"It's no good giving me snuff now," said Mr. Griggs angrily. "How can I sneeze without disarranging all my wigs? Besides, I've already told

you as many times as I have wigs, Hickory Dickory Dare, that I can only shave pigs on pigs' Fridays."

"Well, can you supply this pig with a wig?" the man in brown asked.

"I've no wigs to spare for pigs," the barber snapped.

As I went to Bonner,
I met a pig without a wig
Upon my word and honour.

"And what's good enough for Bonner is good enough for Banbury," he added.

The man in brown turned away sadly, and Mr. Griggs asked Red Riding Hood what she was staring at.

"Do you want a shave?" he grumbled. "I'm using the chisel for shaving to-day, so you'd better come to-morrow, when I shall be using a plane."

"Do you think that Mr. Griggs is mad, Mother?" Red Riding Hood asked when they were out of earshot.

"Hush, dear, you really must not make personal remarks," said her mother. "Poor Mr. Griggs is particularly upset just now."

The barber shaved the mason,
As I suppose
Cut off his nose,
And popped it in a basin.

By now they had reached the house that belonged to Benjamin Blue the butcher. He was a melancholy man, who always cried when he had to kill

He was a melancholy man, who always cried when he had to kill an animal for meat.

"Heigho!" sighed Anthony Rowley.

an animal for meat. No doubt, you have often heard of people being in the blues, and the saying got about because the Blues were such a notoriously melancholy family. The house was melancholy, too; for it was built of blue bricks and roofed with blue tiles.

"I wonder why everything is blue," Red Riding Hood said to her mother.

"Because I am extremely tired of seeing red," said Mr. Blue in a disconsolate voice. "So the sooner you move on with that red cloak of yours the better I shall be pleased."

The mother and daughter moved on as quickly as they could, for they were afraid of the effect of the red cloak on gloomy Mr. Blue.

The next house that attracted their attention was the baker's, Mr. Anthony Rowley.

"Heigho!" sighed Anthony Rowley, leaning over his white gate. "Heigho!"

"Everybody we see gets sadder and sadder," Red Riding Hood whispered.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Rowley," said Mrs. Riding Hood.

"Heigho!" Anthony Rowley sighed once more.

"I'm afraid your garden needs rain," said Mrs. Riding Hood.

It certainly was a very dry-looking garden, full of white dust and not a flower to be seen.

"It's a flour garden," said Anthony Rowley. "And it doesn't knead rain. It's the rain that kneads the flour. But what we do want is wind," he

went on. "Not a breath. Heigho! Heigho! Heigho!"

He sighed so deeply that Red Riding Hood wondered if he was trying to blow round the sails of Mr.

The windmill did not move, and Mr. Marley stood scowling at it, not a bit like the jolly miller.

Marley's windmill, which was standing motionless on a little hill behind the bakery.

Blow, wind, blow! and go, mill, go!
That the miller may grind his corn,
That the baker may take it,
And into rolls make it,
And bring us some hot in the morn.

But the windmill did not move, and Mr. Marley stood scowling at it, not a bit like the jolly miller who lived on the River Dee, while Anthony Rowley went on sighing "Heigho!"

"Which wind would you like?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"Any wind will do," said Anthony Rowley. "But a yeast wind would suit us best."

Mrs. Riding Hood and her daughter hoped politely that the baker would soon have the wind he wanted and passed on their way.

The next house was that of the candlestick-maker, Mr. William Winkie, who was nowhere to be seen, for he was hard at work making a pair of candlesticks for the King of Hearts. But they could hear his angry voice inside grumbling at his apprentice Jack.

Jack, be nimble,
Jack, be quick,
Jack, jump over the candlestick.

And then in an angrier voice they heard him shout:

Liar, liar lick spit;
Turn about the candlestick.
What's good for liar?
Brimstone and fire.

Red Riding Hood tugged at her mother's arm to make her hurry because she felt frightened at hearing

this angry voice. They walked so quickly that they had no time to do more than notice that the next cottage had a signboard on which was painted, *John Horner, Lantern-maker*, before a minute or two afterwards they came to a neat house with two gables. In front was a very tidy garden, the beds of which were edged with cockle-shells and full of plants with nodding silver bells instead of flowers, while in one bed stood a row of nine little girls saying their lessons.

Mistress Mary Q. Contrary.

Mistress Contrary herself was tall, thin, and severe-looking, and for some time Red Riding Hood could not make out what was the matter with her, until she discovered that everything she was wearing was put on the wrong way round.

When Mistress Contrary saw Mrs. Riding Hood,

she shook one of the plants of silver bells and said in a quick dry voice:

"School is over."

The nine little girls all curtsied, turned to the left, walked down the garden path in single file and out of the gate to the village green, where they sat down in a row and studied their school-books without even whispering.

Fifteen little boys came out of the school with their satchels all neatly done up, their caps quite straight, and their boots beautifully clean and, without a single

Suddenly there was a bump, and Mistress Contrary, with a dazed expression, was sitting in the middle of her neat gravel path.

look at Red Riding Hood, stood at attention in the path. Red Riding Hood thought she had never seen such depressingly well-behaved children in her life.

"The boys can play quietly for ten minutes on the Green before going home," Mistress Contrary announced.

And all the boys with one voice said:

"Please, Mistress Contrary, we'd rather begin our lessons for to-morrow."

Mistress Contrary turned with a gratified smile to Mrs. Riding Hood and said:

"The children in my school are the best-behaved children in the world. I hope you are going to be a good little girl," she added, with a suspicious glance at Red Riding Hood.

"I hope so," Red Riding Hood agreed a little doubtfully. "But Puck . . ."

"Puck!" Mistress Contrary exclaimed furiously, before Red Riding Hood had time to finish what she was going to say. "That odious elf!" Suddenly there was a bump, and Mistress Contrary, with a dazed expression, was sitting in the middle of her neat gravel path.

I am sorry to say that Red Riding Hood burst out laughing, whereupon all the boys, who were still standing at attention, looked frightened and bleated with one accord:

"Oh, Mistress Contrary, that little girl laughed at you!"

Mistress Contrary picked herself up and said in a stern voice:

"Let us go inside and discuss the curriculum."

Red Riding Hood wondered what a curriculum was. She had a vague idea that it was a kind of flower; but she was not at all sure, so she said nothing.

On the door of Mistress Contrary's house was a brass plate on which was engraved:

Mistress Mary Q. Contrary's Excessively Select School for Young Ladies and Gentlemen.

"You will observe," said Mistress Contrary proudly, "that my house is arranged quite differently from all other people's houses. For instance, the kitchen range is in the parlour, and I myself always sleep in the pantry."

Red Riding Hood hoped, as this was the case, that perhaps the schoolroom would look more like a playroom. However, in this she was disappointed, for the schoolroom looked exactly like any other schoolroom, except that the blackboard was a whiteboard, and that the maps on the walls were upside down. What particularly took Red Riding Hood's eye was a row of twelve pickle-jars on a large shelf, each of which contained a birch rod.

"Seldom used nowadays, I am glad to say," said Mistress Contrary. "I sincerely hope that I shall not have to uncork one of those jars for my new pupil."

"What time ought my little girl to come to-morrow morning?" Mrs. Riding Hood asked, to change the conversation.

"The curriculum is as follows," Mistress Contrary proclaimed majestically:

Eight o'clock flat . . .	The alphabet.
Five minutes past eight . .	Geology.
Ten minutes past eight . .	Theology.
A quarter past eight . .	Geography.
Twenty minutes past eight .	History.
Twenty-five minutes past eight .	Latin.
Half-past eight. . . .	Astronomy.
Five-and-twenty minutes to nine	Gastronomy.

Twenty minutes to nine	Double Dutch.
A quarter to nine	Algebra.
Ten minutes to nine	Euclid.
Five minutes to nine	Hebrew.
Nine o'clock	Shebrew.*
Ten minutes past nine	Greek.
A quarter past nine	French.
Twenty minutes past nine	Italian.
Twenty-five minutes past nine	Mythology.
Half-past nine	Reading.
Five-and-twenty minutes to ten	Writing.
Twenty minutes to ten	Trigonometry.
A quarter to ten	Astrology.
Ten minutes to ten	Zoology.
Five minutes to ten	Philosophy.
Ten o'clock	Roman Law.
Five minutes past ten	Sanskrit.
Six minutes past ten	Spanish.
Ten minutes past ten	Deportment.
A quarter past ten	Music.
Sixteen minutes past ten	Philology.
Twenty minutes past ten	Pothooks.
Twenty-five minutes past ten	Hangers.
Half-past ten	Crochet.
Five-and-twenty minutes to eleven	Tatting.
Ten minutes to eleven	Sowing seeds for the boys. Sewing handkerchiefs for the girls.
Eleven o'clock	Everybody eats a glass of milk and drinks a rusk.
Five minutes past eleven	Addition.
Ten minutes past eleven	Multiplication.
A quarter past eleven	Subtraction.
Twenty minutes past eleven	Division.
Twenty-five minutes past eleven	Fractions without any vulgarity.
Half-past eleven	Decimals.
Five-and-twenty minutes to twelve	Practice.
Twenty minutes to twelve	Spelling.
A quarter to twelve	German.
Ten minutes to twelve	Danish.

* Shebrew is practical tea-making.

Five minutes to twelve	Butter-making.
Noon	The whole school goes home quietly to dinner.
One o'clock flat	Polite Letter-writing.
Five minutes past one	Natural history.
Ten minutes past one	English grammar.
A quarter past one	Dancing.
Twenty minutes past one	Singing.
Five-and-twenty minutes past one	Chemistry.
Half-past one	Kings of Judah.
Two o'clock	Kings of Israel.
Half-past two	Kings of Judah.
Three o'clock	Kings of Israel.
Half-past three	Kings of Judah.
Four o'clock	Kings of Israel.

"When you came in the little girls were repeating the Kings of Judah, and they are now studying the Kings of Israel for to-morrow. In addition to the ordinary school curriculum, all boys and girls are expected to study quietly at home, and heavy holiday tasks are set to keep the children on their best behaviour during the holidays. The holiday task for Easter was to count the number of times Doctor Johnson uses the letters A, B and C in his famous dictionary."

"Well, I'm sure that I am very much obliged to you, ma'am," said Mrs. Riding Hood to the schoolmistress. "My little daughter will come to school to-morrow morning at eight o'clock sharp. And now we must not detain you any longer, because I am sure that you will be wanting your tea."

"My breakfast, you mean," said Mistress Contrary. "I have eaten nothing since I dined this morning at seven o'clock, for I missed my supper at mid-day."

Red Riding Hood was longing to know why she had missed her supper; but she looked at those rods in pickle, and decided that she had better not ask.

When Red Riding Hood was walking along with her

mother to explore the rest of the village, she wanted very much to talk to some of the little boys and girls that were going to be her schoolfellows; but they were

Doctor Foster
Went to Gloster
In a shower of rain,
He stepped in a puddle
Right up to his middle
And never went there again.

all so busily engaged in being useful by running errands for their parents or in learning their own lessons for to-morrow that she did not like to interrupt them. She and her mother passed Dr. Foster's big house; but they did not see the doctor himself.

"His rheumatism keeps him indoors a great deal," Mrs. Riding Hood explained.

Doctor Foster
Went to Gloster
In a shower of rain,
He stepped in a puddle
Right up to his middle
And never went there again.

"In fact he couldn't walk as far nowadays, for ever since he stepped into that puddle his rheumatism has been chronic."

They went by *The Three Pouting Pigeons*, and a gloomy inhospitable inn it looked. It was not surprising that travellers seldom came to Banbury Cross in these days. Landlord Porgie was standing in the yard, scowling at all and sundry. Beyond the inn were the houses and shops of Thomas Tucker the tailor, Charles Wagg the grocer, Laurence Locket the locksmith, Ferdinand Fisher the fishmonger, and H. D. Dock the watchmaker, and almost at the end of the village was a large farmhouse surrounded by barns and pigsties and stacks and granaries.

"That's the house that Jack built," said Mrs. Riding Hood. "But now it belongs to Farmer Muffet. The cottage over there is Peter Peep's cottage. Peter Peep is Farmer Muffet's shepherd, and next door to him is Hickory Dickory Dare the pigman."

They walked along past the village smithy, where Francis Flinders the blacksmith was shoeing a horse. Red Riding Hood would have liked to loiter and watch the proceedings; if any other little girls or boys had been loitering, no doubt she would have done so, too. As it was, she made up her mind to loiter there at the first opportunity.

Beyond the smithy was a particularly cross-looking and very untidy cottage.

"That belongs to Samuel Stout the pedlar," said Mrs. Riding Hood. "And next door, in that glass cottage, lives John Sage Green, the Rectory gardener. You can't see the Rectory from here, because it's hidden by those elm trees. But no doubt Parson Bell and Mrs. Bell will invite you there some day."

The last house in the village was at the foot of Pippen Hill.

"Who lives there?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"Dame Trot," said her mother. "She lives there with her grandchildren, Jack and Jill. Their father is dead. He was a solicitor."

Tommy Trot, a man of law,
Sold his bed and lay upon straw;
Sold the straw and slept on grass,
To buy his wife a looking-glass.

"And now," Mrs. Riding Hood said, "it is high time we were getting back to our own high tea."

"Why is it called high tea, Mother?"

"Nobody knows," said Mrs. Riding Hood.

And with this answer her little daughter had to be content.

CHAPTER IX MISTRESS MARY QUITE CONTRARY'S SCHOOL

CHAPTER IX. MISTRESS MARY QUITE CONTRARY'S SCHOOL

YOU can imagine that Red Riding Hood was very much excited at the idea of going to school in Banbury Cross for the first time. What a pity it is that we cannot go on being just as much excited every morning when we go to school as we were on that first morning! She left Woodbine Cottage at ten minutes to eight and ran all the way to Mistress Contrary's; but even with so much speed she was the very last, for the children of Banbury Cross were so punctual that it was impossible to get anywhere before them. Everybody behaved beautifully. None of the little boys pushed the little girls, and none of the little girls scratched the little boys. None of the little boys called the little girls rude names, and none of the little girls put out her tongue at any little boy. None of the little boys had inky fingers. None of the little boys drew faces on his nails. None of the little boys sucked acid-drops in secret. None of the little girls had a spotted pinafore. None of the little girls had tied up her boots with string. None of the little girls had wrinkled stockings.

As soon as the class was assembled, Mistress Contrary read out of an enormous black book the names of the children.

"Jack Horner!"

"Present," said Jack Horner in a very oily voice. He was a fat boy with pasty cheeks, who wore spectacles. Red Riding Hood thought

Jack Horner.

Tom Piper.

what fun it would be to stick a pin into his leg.

"Tom Piper!"

When Tom Piper answered to his name Red Riding Hood thought that he looked a very jolly kind of boy; and she made up her mind to give Tom Piper, who was sitting next Jack Horner, a long pin, so that he could stick it into Jack Horner at the first opportunity.

Peter Piper.

"Peter Piper!"

Peter was Tom's younger brother. He did not look so nice as Tom. He had rather a greedy face.

"Willie Winkie!"

Red Riding Hood took quite a fancy to Willie Winkie, and decided that when she got married she would marry him. He had rosy cheeks, bright brown eyes, and golden curls. The general atmosphere of goodness made him look a little too angelic; but Red Riding Hood was sure that with some encouragement he would be very much the reverse.

Willie Winkie.

"Tommy Tittlemouse!"

Tommy was the son of a famous poacher who lived in Tanglewood Coppice, and used to be the terror of the country-side. But he had reformed, and now he never poached anything but eggs.

Tommy Tittlemouse.

Johnny Green.

"Johnny Green!"

Johnny Green, the son of the Rectory gardener, had a black bullet head, with a cunning, cruel expression and narrow eyes.

"Sammy Stout!"

Sammy Stout was very different from Johnny. He had a kind face, an open face that one could trust.

Georgie Porgie.

Charley Wagg.

Robert Rowley.

Jack Trot.

"Georgie Porgie!"
"Charley Wagg!"
"Robert Rowley!"

All these boys were fat and greedy.

"Jack Trot!"

He was quite a pleasant boy to look at, but he was very awkward and ungainly. Even when he was sitting at his desk, he looked every moment as if he was going to fall on the floor.

Tom Tucker.

"Tom Tucker!"

Tom Tucker was the leading choir-boy, and he was so fond of singing that his mouth was just a big O.

"Willy Bell!"

Willy looked a conceited and inquisitive boy.

Willy Bell.

"Bernard Bunting!"

Bernard had been very much spoilt by his father and mother when he was a baby, and that seemed to have made him delicate. Red Riding Hood voted him a molly-coddle, because he was wearing a rabbit-skin muffler on this warm summer day.

Bernard Bunting.

Boy Blue.

"Boy Blue!"

He woke up with a start when Mistress Contrary called out his name. Red Riding Hood thought that he was the sleepiest looking boy she had ever seen. But he was nice to look at, with almost as many golden curls as Willie Winkie.

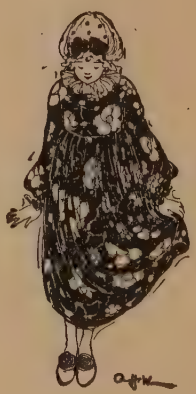
When the boys had all answered to their names, Mistress Contrary turned round to call out the girls:

"Jill Trot!"

Jill, who was at the head of the girls, may have been clever, but she looked every bit as clumsy as her brother Jack; and the way she sprawled over her desk was really a disgrace for the head girl, Red Riding Hood thought.

"Betty Blue!"

Jill Trot.



Betty Blue.

"Dolly Piper!"

Betty was very much like her brother Boy to look at, and Dolly was very much like her elder brother Tom. Dolly was the biggest girl in the class, and it was rumoured that she was going to be one of Farmer Muffet's dairymaids after this term.

Dolly Piper.

Lucy Locket. *Kitty Fisher.*

"Lucy Locket!"

"Kitty Fisher!"

Lucy and Kitty were great friends. Red Riding Hood did not think that she should care much for either of them, so vain appeared Lucy and so sly Kitty.

Margery Daw.

"Margery Daw!"

Margery was the granddaughter of old Mr. Daw the sexton, a picturesque little girl with hair as dark as the raven's wing.

"Elsie Marley!"

Elsie Marley.

Bo Peep.

Elsie was fat and sleepy-looking. Not at all attractive, Red Riding Hood decided.

"Bo Peep!"

Bo Peep was as dainty as a porcelain figure, the prettiest little girl you can imagine.

"Polly Flinders!"

Polly, the blacksmith's daughter, was the baby of the class—a merry little imp whom Red Riding Hood was glad to find herself sitting next.

"The first lesson to-day," Mistress Contrary announced, "will be on the management of apple pies."

Jack Horner's eyes glittered. He evidently was not afraid that he should lose his place at the head of his class over this lesson.

"Jack Horner," Mistress Contrary asked, "What did B do to the apple-pie?"

"B bit it," said Jack Horner, smacking his lips greedily.

Polly Flinders.

"Tom Piper, what did C do to it?"

"C cut it," said Tom.

"Peter Piper, what did D do to it?"

"D dealt it," said Peter.

"Willie Winkie, what did E do to it?"

"E eat it," said Willie.

"Tommy Tittlemouse, what did F do to it?"

"F fought for it," said Tommy.

"Johnny Green, what did G do to it?"

"G got it," said Johnnie.

"Sammy Stout, what did H do to it?"

"H had it," said Sammy.

"Georgie Porgie, what did I do to it?"

"Please, ma'am, I don't know," said Georgie.

"Charlie Wagg, what did I do to the apple-pie?"

"Please, ma'am, I never saw," Charlie mumbled.

"Robert Rowley, what did I do to the apple-pie?"

Robert stared at her open-mouthed.

"I inked it," said Mistress Contrary severely.

"Did you?" exclaimed Robert, opening his mouth wider than ever.

"Foolish boy, not I myself, but I the letter. What did J do to it, Jack Trot?"

"J joined it," said Jack.

"What did K do to it, Tom Tucker?"

"K kept it," said Tom.

"What did L do to it, Willy Bell?"

"L longed for it," said Willie.

"What did M do to it, Bernard Bunting?"

"M mourned for it," said Bernard.

"What did N do to it, Boy Blue?"

There was no answer for a moment.

"Boy Blue," Mistress Contrary exclaimed, angrily banging her cane on the desk, "you are nodding."

"N nodded for it, ma'am," said Boy Blue, managing to wake up and look bright.

Mistress Contrary turned to the girls.

"Jill Trot, what did O do to it?"

"O opened it," said Jill.

"Betty Blue, what did P do to it?"

"P peeped at it," said Betty.

"Dolly Piper, what did Q do to it?"

"Q quartered it," said Dolly.

"Lucy Locket, what did R do to it?"

"R ran for it," said Lucy.

"Kitty Fisher, what did S do to it?"

"S stole it," said Kitty, getting very red for some reason or other.

"Margery Daw, what did T do to it?"

"T took it," said Margery.

"Elsie Marley, what did U do to it?"

"Please, ma'am, I never did anything to it. I

never touched it," said Elsie, looking as if she were going to cry.

"U understood what her mistress was talking about, idle, foolish, and sleepy girl. U used it." Mistress Contrary snapped.

"U used it," repeated Elsie.

"Bo Peep, what did V do to it?"

"V viewed it," said Bo Peep.

"Polly Flinders, what did W do to it?"

"W wanted it," said Pollie.

"What did X Y Z and Ampersand do to it, Red Riding Hood?"

Red Riding Hood had not the remotest idea.

"Fetch the dunce's-cap," said Mistress Contrary grimly.

Jill Trot, whose duty this was, fetched the dunce's cap; and Red Riding Hood had to put it on her head and stand on a stool in the corner.

"Where you will stay," said Mistress Contrary, "until you have remembered what X Y Z and Ampersand did to the apple-pie."

Red Riding Hood was thinking that she should be likely to stay there for the rest of her life, when she suddenly had a brilliant idea of what X did to it.

"Please, ma'am," she said turning round, "I think I know what X did to it. I think X examined it."

"Wrong," said Mistress Contrary. "Fetch another dunce's-cap."

"Did Y yell for it?" Red Riding Hood asked.

A third dunce's-cap was put on top of the other two. Remembering that I had inked it, Red Riding Hood made one more attempt.

"Z zinked it," she exclaimed.

If all the world was apple-pie,
And all the sea was ink,
And all the trees were bread and cheese,
What should we have to drink?

"Fetch another dunce's-cap," said Mistress Contrary. "And now to bring our lesson on apple-pies to a close, what child can answer this question?"

If all the world was apple-pie,
And all the sea was ink,
And all the trees were bread and cheese,
What should we have to drink?

There was a moment's pause, and then Jack Horner held up his hand.

"Well, Jack, what should we have to drink?" Mistress Contrary asked.

It is enough to make an old man
Scratch his head and think,

said Jack Horner.

"Quite right," said Mistress Contrary. "And Jack has answered so well that we can go on to our Arithmetic. All children take their slates and make notes of what I am going to say:"

One, two, buckle my shoe;
Three, four, shut the door;
Five, six, pick up sticks;
Seven, eight, lay them straight;
Nine, ten, a good fat hen;
Eleven, twelve, dig and delve;
Thirteen, fourteen, maids a-courting;
Fifteen, sixteen, maids in the kitchen;
Seventeen, eighteen, maids in waiting;
Nineteen, twenty, my platter's empty.

When the class had taken notes industriously, Mistress Contrary set the following sum in simple addition:

As I was going to St. Ives,
I met a man with seven wives;
Every wife had seven sacks,
Every sack had seven cats,
Every cat had seven kits;
Kits, cats, sacks, and wives,
How many were there going to St. Ives?

This sum was altogether too much for the boys and girls of Banbury Cross. You never heard such

groaning over a sum before; you never saw slates covered with so many figures. Even though she was wearing four dunces'-caps one on top of the other, so that they nearly touched the ceiling, Red Riding Hood was glad to escape from that terrible sum.

"We cannot waste the whole morning on a few simple figures," said Mistress Contrary. "The answer is two thousand eight hundred and one."

With one accord the class cried:

"Oh, ma'am, how marvellously clever you are!"

And this tribute so much pleased her that she stopped all Arithmetic for that day.

"The next lesson," she said, "will be English History. All children take slates and make notes."

The brave old Duke of York,
He had ten thousand men;
He marched them up a very big hill,
Then marched them down again.

And when they were up, they were up—up—up—
And when they were down, they were down—down—down—
And when they were only half-way up,
They were neither up nor down.

"What was the date of this famous event? 1066 was the date."

When good King Arthur ruled this land,
He was a goodly king,
He stole three sacks of barley meal,
To make a bag-pudding.

A bag-pudding the King did make,
And stuffed it well with plums,
And in it put great lumps of fat,
As big as my two thumbs.

A bag-pudding the King did make.

The King and Queen did eat thereof,
And noblemen beside ;
And what they could not eat that night,
The Queen next morning fried.

And what they could not eat that night,
The Queen next morning fried.

"All children make a note that King Arthur ruled England in 1066."

When the History lesson was over, the two biggest girls, Dolly Piper and Elsie Marley, were told to turn the mangle while the rest of the girls sang:

They that wash on Monday
Have all the week to dry;
They that wash on Tuesday
Are not so much awry;
They that wash on Wednesday
Are not so much to blame,
They that wash on Thursday
Wash for shame;
They that wash on Friday
Wash in need.
And they that wash on Saturday.
Oh, they're sluts indeed.

The interesting thing about this mangle was that it squeaked in time, which made it sound something like a barrel-organ.

While the girls were having their laundry lesson, the boys had been given several plaster busts of bearded celebrities to study; and when the laundry lesson was over Mistress Contrary announced that she should now lecture on Biography or the private lives of famous men. She placed one of the busts on the desk in front of her, and began:

"The life of Solomon Grundy. Born 1066. Died in the same year."

Solomon Grundy,
Born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Took ill on Thursday,

Worse on Friday,
Died on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday;
That was the end
Of Solomon Grundy.

"His wife, Mrs. Grundy, is still alive and has visited Banbury Cross several times," she concluded.

Red Riding Hood was beginning to wish that she could find out what X Y Z and Ampersand did to the apple-pie, when the lesson on Deportment was called, and she was glad to be still on her stool. The boys and girls were marched up and down the room, in and out of the door, round and round the garden paths, until it would have made you giddy to look at them. They had to march, moreover, with sticks across their backs and bunches of holly under their chins. It must have been most unpleasant. The girls had to sing:

Come when you're called,
Do as you're bid,
Shut the door after you,
Never be chid.

The boys had to sing:

He that would thrive
Must rise at five;
He that hath thriven
May lie till seven;
And he that by the plough would thrive
Himself must either hold or drive.

And both the girls and boys had to sing together:

Go to bed first, a golden purse;
Go to bed second, a golden pheasant,
Go to bed third, a golden bird.

When it was time for the Geography lesson, they were all as straight as pokers, and they paid particular attention to Mistress Contrary's observations on Western Europe:

Dr. Faustus was a good man,
He whipt his scholars now and then;
When he whipt them he made them dance
Out of Scotland into France,
Out of France into Spain,
Then he whipt them back again.

"*How many miles to Babylon?*" Mistress Contrary asked.

"*Three-score miles and ten,*" said Jack Horner.

"*Can I get there by candle-light?*" she went on.

"*Yes, and back again,*" said Jack Horner.

"*If your heels are nimble and light,*
You may get there by candle-light," Jill Trot added, at which everybody laughed, because poor Jill's heels were not at all nimble and light.

"The next lesson is on Behaviour," Mistress Contrary said in a very severe voice. "All children listen with both ears."

A man of words and not of deeds
Is like a garden full of weeds,
And when the weeds begin to grow,
It's like a garden full of snow;

And when the snow begins to fall,
It's like a bird upon a wall;
And when the bird away does fly,
It's like an eagle in the sky;
And when the sky begins to roar,
It's like a lion at the door;
And when the door begins to crack,
It's like a stick across your back;
And when your back begins to smart,
It's like a penknife in your heart;
And when your heart begins to bleed,
You're dead, and dead, and dead indeed.

After this solemn lecture, the lesson on Natural History was quite a relief:

The dove says "Coo, Coo, what shall I do?
I can scarce maintain two."
"Pooh, pooh," says the wren, "I have got ten,
And keep them all like gentlemen!"

Birds of a feather flock together,
And so will pigs and swine,
Rats and mice will have their choice,
And so will have I mine.

The next lesson was Gardening:

Rosemary green,
Lavender blue,
Thyme and sweet marjoram,
Hyssop and rue.

The next lesson was Scripture:

Says Aaron to Moses,
"Let's cut off our noses";
Says Moses to Aaron,
"'Tis the fashion to wear them."

The next lesson was Human Origins:

What are little boys made of, made of?
What are little boys made of?
Slugs and snails, and puppy-dogs' tails;
That's what little boys are made of.

What are little girls made of, made of?
What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice, and all things nice;
That's what little girls are made of.

The next lesson was Archery:

All of a row,
Bend the bow,
Shot at a pigeon,
And killed a crow.

The next lesson was Spanish:

Rain, rain, go to Spain,
And never come back again!

But I must not go on with any more of Mistress Contrary's lessons, or you will begin to think that you have gone to school yourselves.

Poor Red Riding Hood, standing on her stool and weighed down by four dunces'-caps, grew more and more tired and more and more hot. She began to wonder if she would not rather be back within the sound of the bells of St. Giles'. And the more she tried to think what X Y Z and Ampersand did to the apple-pie, the less could she think about anything at all except her own dinner.

When the silver bells in the garden rang at noon, Mistress Contrary asked Jack Horner to tell Red Riding Hood the answer.

Jack Horner put on his most sanctimonious expression and said in his oily voice :

"X Y Z and Ampersand all wished for a piece in hand."

"And who is Ampersand ?" Red Riding Hood asked.

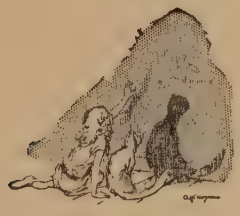
"Ampersand *is* and," said Mistress Contrary, and drew on the whiteboard

&

When Red Riding Hood went home and tried to explain to her mother about Ampersand, she simply could not get the picture right.

"But I know it was an eight sitting like a cat," she said.

"Waul ! Waul ! Fancy that !" Diddle Dumpty exclaimed.



"Waul ! Waul ! Fancy that !"

CHAPTER X UP WITH THE LARK

CHAPTER X UP WITH THE LARK

WHEN Red Riding Hood went to bed that night, she lay awake for a long time wondering to herself if she could possibly stand any more school. She might have been able to put up with the severity of Mistress Contrary, if she had not felt that her school-fellows disapproved of her just as much as her mistress did. She tried to make herself not wish to be back in London within the sound of Bow bells, because she did not want to be ungrateful to Santa Claus and Puck and Mother Goose, and because she was happy to think that her mother did not have to make any more shirts to pay for her bread and butter and Diddle Dumpty's milk. But she did feel that life in the country was rather a disappointment. She had always thought that children in the country spent their time in playing all sorts of delightful games, like making daisy-chains and cowslip-balls, or dancing round maypoles or chasing butterflies. She had been told about the wonderful shops that could be kept in meadows, where sorrel seeds were sold for brown sugar and daisy centres for butter, and squeezed-out juice of dandelion stalks for milk. She had looked forward to such games as *Queen Anne, Queen Anne, she sits in the sun,* and *Green Gravel ;* but instead of playing games, all the children of Banbury Cross went about singing :

Twice two are four,
Twice three are six,
Twice four are eight,
Twice five are ten,

which of course was perfectly true, but not very interesting.

While she was lying awake with these gloomy thoughts. she tried to drive away her disappointment

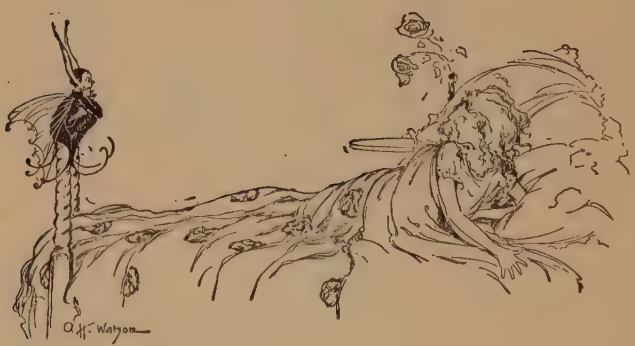
by watching the shadow pantomime on the ceiling. There was one particularly active shadow which, the more Red Riding Hood looked at it, the less it looked like the shadow of the plum-tree in the garden, until at last it came right out of the ceiling and, crossing its legs, sat down at the foot of her bed.

"Puck!" Red Riding Hood exclaimed joyfully. She wondered at herself now for having been so stupid as to suppose it was anything else but Puck, and she could not imagine why she should ever have fancied that it was the shadow of the plum-tree in the garden.

"Well, how are you getting on?" Puck asked.

"I don't think I am getting on at all," said Red Riding Hood. "I hate school."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Puck, rubbing his hands.



Of course I'm not in mourning. I'm in evening."

Red Riding Hood was astonished to see Puck dressed entirely in black velvet. She was afraid at first that somebody must have died in Fairyland, until she remembered that Fairies never die. However, she could not resist asking, just to be quite sure, if Puck was in mourning.

"In mourning?" he repeated indignantly. "Of course I'm not in mourning. I'm in evening. You don't suppose that Fairies are as silly as mortals and wear black for mourning?"

"I beg your pardon," said Red Riding Hood. "But I have never seen you in black before."

"I'm on my way to the Goblins' Ball," said Puck. "That is why I am in black. It's a compliment to my hosts."

"I hope you'll enjoy yourself," said Red Riding Hood, who half hoped that Puck would invite her to accompany him.

"This makes the million and first Goblins' Ball I shall have been to," said Puck. "And as they are always the same every year, I do not expect to enjoy myself particularly. But, as I said to the King, it's no use giving ourselves too many airs simply because we live above ground. One never knows what may happen, I said, and if the world were turned inside out we might find it very inconvenient to be in the black books of the Goblins. However, I did not come here to talk to you about Goblins, but about Banbury Cross. You have simply got to wake that school up."

"I wish I could," said Red Riding Hood. "But I don't know how to begin. Oh, Puck! they are all so dreadfully good. You've no idea how good they are."

"What you have got to do," said Puck, "is to get

up with the lark to-morrow morning, and not only get up with the lark yourself, but persuade everybody else to get up with the larks."

"Why, then we shall be more punctual than ever," said Red Riding Hood.

"Well, I haven't time to stop and argue now," said Puck. "But you will find that I am right."

Red Riding Hood remembered nothing more until she woke up next morning and heard a bird singing very loudly upon her window-sill.

"It must be the Lark," she cried, jumping out of bed and running to the window.

"Good morning, Lark," said Red Riding Hood; and the Lark, who was the biggest lark she had ever seen, sang louder than ever.

"Puck told me last night that I was to get up with you."

"Tweetle-tweetle-twee," said the Lark.

I suppose I ought to explain to you that in Larkin or Lark language 'Tweetle-tweetle-twee' means 'Get on my back, and I will take you for a long flight before breakfast.'

Red Riding Hood felt rather proud that she was able to understand what the Lark said, and she thought that it would be much more sensible if Mistress Contrary taught Larkin in her school instead of all those useless languages she did teach.

"Shan't I be too heavy for you?" she asked.

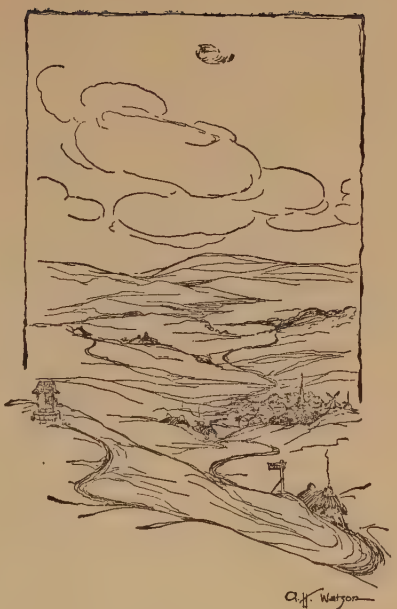
"Twee-tweetle," said the Lark, which means:

'You won't be a bit too heavy, but please don't hold on to my throat too tightly or I shall not be able to sing when I am flying; and if I cannot sing when I am flying I shall fall; and if I fall, you will fall.'

I don't suppose that anybody in Banbury Cross

saw Red Riding Hood being carried up higher and higher on the Lark's back, and I daresay that if anybody had seen her he would only have supposed that she was a little white cloud flying across the blue sky.

"Beak airful," said the Lark, when he stopped singing for a moment and dropped a thousand beaks nearer to the earth before he went soaring up again higher than ever into the sky.



A little white cloud flying across the blue sky.

Of course, as I suppose many of you know, birds do not measure by yards, feet and inches, like human beings, but by nests, beaks and claws.

12 claws	=	1 beak.
3 beaks	=	1 nest.
5½ nests	=	1 perch.
40 perches	=	1 featherlong.
8 featherlongs	=	1 crow's mile.

You may be sure that Red Riding Hood enjoyed the sensation of flying thousands of beaks into the air. She planted both feet firmly in the chirrups and held on to the strains with both hands. She felt, as she looked at the earth below, that she should not mind what mischief she accomplished when she was down in that green world once more. The Lark's throat throbbed with music and his wings glittered in the sunlight. Then suddenly that wonderful song ceased; he folded his pinions, and dropped like a stone. But Red Riding Hood did not feel at all frightened; and of course she had no reason to be frightened, because the Lark brought her down to earth so safely that she was able to slip from his back into her own bed.

"Beak wick," he chirped, and a moment later was gone, while from downstairs Red Riding Hood heard her mother calling:

"And dress! It's after nine. You'll never be at school this morning."

Red Riding Hood dressed herself as quickly as she could; but when she went downstairs she had to tell her mother about getting up with the Lark, so that when she reached the classroom the silver bells in Mistress Contrary's garden were tinkling ten o'clock. I should have expected her to feel a little nervous at arriving so late for school on her second morning. Not at all. She marched boldly in and sang to a tune she had learnt from the Lark:

She marched boldly in and sang:
A dillar, a dollar,
A ten o'clock scholar!

A dillar, a dollar,
A ten o'clock scholar!

"Do you see what the time is?" Mistress Contrary demanded in a stern voice, as she opened her desk and took out an enormous corkscrew with which she began to uncork one of the pickle-jars where the birch-rods were kept.

Red Riding Hood saw that most of her school-

The unusual spectacle of a little girl playing truant from Mistress Contrary's school.

fellows were impressed by her daring, and remembering what Puck had told her she felt that it would never do to let herself be whipped by Mistress Contrary, if she ever wanted to have any kind of bad influence. So what did she do but jump right out of the window and run away from school as fast as her legs would carry her.

Her friend the Lark was singing hundreds of beaks up in the sky, and when she heard that encouraging song again she was sure that she was capable of defeating Jack Horner and defying her schoolmistress. As she was running along through the village, several mothers came and looked over their garden-gates at the unusual spectacle of a little girl playing truant from Mistress Contrary's school. No such sight had been seen in Banbury Cross since the days when it was Banbury Gay.

There was nothing much to loiter for in the village. Pedlar Stout was trying to sell some needles to Mr. Rowley the baker; and as Red Riding Hood went by she heard Mr. Rowley say:

"Heigho!"

I need not your needles, they're needless to me,
For kneading of needles were needless, you see;
But did my neat trousers but need to be kneed,
I then should have need of your needles indeed.

Red Riding Hood thought how much she should like some of Pedlar Stout's needles to run into Jack Horner; but she did not care for the look of the Pedlar himself, who was, in fact, a most disagreeable man, so she did not ask him for any.

Red Riding Hood decided that the jolliest way of enjoying such a lovely morning would be to go and visit her grandmother in Tanglewood Coppice; but

she did not know the way and she did not want to walk there by herself, so when she got near to Woodbine Cottage she called to Diddle Dumpty to bring her fiddle and come with her.

"Do you think you could find the way to Grandmama's house, Diddle Dumpty?"

"Purrfectly waul," Diddle Dumpty replied, jumping down from the plum-tree where she was sunning herself.

"Then put on your boots and come with me."

"Have you got purrmission from your miaother to go?" Diddle Dumpty asked.

"Good gracious," she exclaimed. "Don't you begin to be good. I'm playing truant."

"So I purrceive."

"Where's Mother now?"

"She's gone to miaowake a few purrchases in Banbury," said the cat. "I expect she will buy something good for suppurr."

"Come on, Diddle Dumpty," Red Riding Hood begged. "Don't let's waste this lovely morning."

And Diddle Dumpty soon forgot all about giving good advice. She put on her thick ratskin boots, and a minute or two later she was fiddling down the road in front of her little mistress on the way to Tanglewood Coppice.

"Good gracious, don't you begin to be good."

CHAPTER XI MOTHER DUMPTY

THE way to Tanglewood Coppice, where old Mrs. Hubbard lived, was easy enough as soon as you had passed the Crooked Mile. Now it was not because the crooked mile was any longer than an ordinary straight mile that it took up so much of Red Riding Hood's time, but because she simply had to stop and look at all the crooked things she met.

There was a crooked man, and he went a crooked mile ;
He found a crooked sixpence against a crooked stile ;
He bought a crooked cat, which caught a crooked mouse ;
And they all lived together in a little crooked house.

Of course, Red Riding Hood had heard of him, and so she began to walk with her eyes on the ground, looking for a piece of crooked money, if it were only a crooked farthing. She was walking along like this, when she bumped into somebody coming from the opposite direction. This was Peter White, who earned his living by cutting crooks for shepherds and shepherdesses from the spindle-tree spinneys that grew on either side of the crooked mile.

Peter White will ne'er go right ;
Would you know the reason why ?
He follows his nose where'er he goes,
And that stands all awry.

Peter White's nose now led him bump into Red Riding Hood, who asked him, not very politely, where he thought he was going.

"I thought I was going somewhere," he said. "But I didn't think I was going anywhere in particular."

"Don't you know where you want to go ?" Red Riding Hood asked, a little contemptuously.

"My nose knows," he said. "But my eyes know

"I thought I was going somewhere," he said. "But I didn't think I was going anywhere in particular."

not. My knees knew yesterday, because I fell down and grazed them. I think that if I could graze my nose instead of my knees, it might do it good. Yet when I'm sitting still, my eyes behave themselves.

So do my hands. I made a beautiful crook this morning for Mr. Peep the shepherd. 'Why, Mr. White,' he said, when he saw it, 'that's the very crook for my ewes.' That's just it," Peter White continued. "It's ewesful to have crooked eyes to make crooks for ewes. I'm practising now to see if I can make crooks with my nose."

"Purry up," said Diddle Dumpty. "All the people you meet on the crooked mile talk in such a miaowound-about way that if you purrsist in talking to them we shall never get to miaoyour grandmother's to-day."

Red Riding Hood bade Peter White good day and hurried on her road. But she was not rid of him so easily, and before she reached the end of the crooked mile he had bumped into her quite half a dozen times more.

"Dear me-ow!" Diddle Dumpty yawned. "This crooked mile makes even me-ow want to paws and think. Many's the time I've wheeled my kittens along here in the purrambulator. Many and many a time!"

Red Riding Hood had often heard the story of Diddle Dumpty's adventures before she left Banbury Cross to seek her fortune in London; but now that she knew Banbury Cross she thought that the story would be more interesting, and she begged the cat to relate it all over again.

"Did you live near here?" she asked.

"Just beyond," said Diddle Dumpty. "You see that hill over there?"

But by the time Red Riding Hood was looking in the direction that Diddle Dumpty was pointing with her claw the hill was not over there, but over somewhere else.

"It is over there really," said Diddle Dumpty.

"Go on looking where I pointed purrst, and you will be there again purresently. The hill is purrfectly purrmanent. It's only the road that keeps twisting about."

Sure enough, soon the hill was over there, just as Diddle Dumpty had foretold.

"I see it," Red Riding Hood cried.

There was an old woman lived under a hill;
And if she's not gone, she lives there still.

"Yes," the cat went on, "that's where old Mother Dumpty was ordered to live. We'll call and pay her a visit on miaour way to Tanglewood Coppice."

Red Riding Hood did begin to wish so hard that the road would become straight, for the prospect of seeing Mother Dumpty was most exciting.

"Is she really a witch?" she asked.

"She's a white witch," said Diddle Dumpty. "And she never did any harm to a purrson. In fact, she did a great deal of good. But the villagers of Banbury Cross purrsecuted her and she was purremptorily ordered to live beyond the confines of the purrish."

"What long words you do use, Diddle Dumpty," Red Riding Hood exclaimed.

"The longest words I can find," the cat replied proudly. "In the course of my purrigrinations, I've purrplexed a lot of purrsons with my words, and they've all said I was a most purrspicacious cat. Nothing makes a cat more respected than the purrpetual and purrtinacious purrsuit of the best purriodicals. Nothing is more purrnicious than a purrfunctory purrusal. . . ."

But Diddle Dumpty had been using such long words that before she could finish her sentence the crooked mile was passed. The entrance of Mother

Dumpty's house under the hill was now plainly visible, and Red Riding Hood was too much excited at the prospect of seeing a white witch to pay any more attention to the cat.

The meeting between Diddle Dumpty and her former mistress was an affecting one, because Mother Dumpty had recently lost her only son, who had fallen off a wall on the outskirts of Banbury Cross and had been smashed to pieces.

"My Humpty meant it for the best," Mother Dumpty sobbed. "He was trying to set a bad eggsample to the other children. My poor boy! My darling Humpty! All that could be colleggted of the pieces were placed in an oval coffin and buried in Banbury Churchyard, and on his grave I planted an egg-plant and a bower of eglantine."

I am sorry to say that Red Riding Hood was not so sympathetic with poor Mother Dumpty as she ought to have been, because she was too much engaged in trying to peep into Mother Dumpty's house under the hill to pay much attention to anything else. And really I don't think that she can be blamed, for it is not every little girl who has the chance of inspecting such a curious dwelling-place. You must not imagine that it was a kind of cave. No, it was a real house under the hill, with a door and four windows; and although there were no walls, the roots of the flowers and grasses growing on the hillside made the rooms warm, comfortable, and cosy.

"The only thing I have to worry about," said Mother Dumpty, when she was showing Red Riding Hood her kitchen, "is that egg-cupboard."

She pointed to a large cupboard in the corner

"That egg-cupboard must never be opened," she said solemnly. "If the door of that egg-cupboard

"I've lain awake in my bed and listened to that there dratted hill rumbling and grumbling and mumbling to himself behind the egg-cupboard door."

were opened the teeniest little bit, do you know what would happen?"

Red Riding Hood shook her head.

"If that door were opened," Mother Dumpty said, "I wouldn't say but what the hill would come into the house."

Red Riding Hood shuddered.

"Yes, you may well shiver and shake and shudder," said Mother Dumpty. "For I shiver and shake and shudder myself. Some are afraid of thieves. I'm not. Some fear wolves and lions. I don't. Some sniff anxiously for fire. Not me. Some quake because they fancy they can hear demons in the passage. I don't give a snap of the fingers for any demons. But I've lain awake in my bed and listened to that there dratted hill rumbling and grumbling and mumbling to himself behind the egg-cupboard door. I've heard him fumbling and stumbling inside and sometimes tumbling over himself to get into the house. I have heard him bumbling like

a bee and jumbling like an elephant until I haven't known, no, my dear, I haven't known whether my head or my feet were on the pillow. I've been that hurried and worried and flurried and scurried, my dear, I haven't known if I was a rhipotamus or a hipponoceros. And what will you take? A cup of T or a glass of small B R? Or might I press upon you a plate of thin Z and but R?"

Red Riding Hood was feeling thirsty, but she did not think that she was old enough to drink beer and asked if she might have a glass of lemonade.

"I can offer you some red Y N," said Mother Dumpty. "And I believe I have just a drain of C water left at the bottom of the cask."

Red Riding Hood said that she should like a glass of plain water.

"Oh, and that I can't give you," said Mother Dumpty. "Hill water, yes, but plain water, no."

"Then hill water, please," said Red Riding Hood politely.

While she was drinking her water, Mother Dumpty and Diddle Dumpty had a long talk together over old times.

"You suffered, Diddle," said the old woman. "There's no doubt but what you had the blame for everything."

The cat shook her tail.

"What hurt me miaost," she said, "was the way Tom Tucker turned on me."

Little Tom Tucker, sing for his supper, said his mother.

What shall he sing for? I asked.

White bread and butter, she answered.

"And then when I was prepurring to enjoy the mewsic, Tom Tucker began:

Sing, sing, what shall I sing?
The cat has eaten the pudding-string.
Do, do, what shall I do?
The cat has bitten it quite in two.

"I didn't expect that from Tom Tucker. It was the sort of song I should have expected from Jack Horner or Johnny Green. I suppose it was Hannah Bantry who put him up to it when Mr. Tucker caught her out over the mutton-bone and she laid the blame on me."

"Yes, there's no doubt but what you suffered cruelly," said Mother Dumpty. "And now there's my poor Humpty dead and buried and me left all alone under this hill. I wish you'd come back and keep a poor old woman company, Diddle."

The cat looked at Red Riding Hood, who said quickly:

"Oh, please, Mrs. Dumpty, don't ask Diddle to leave me!"

You may think that it was rather selfish of Red Riding Hood not to want Diddle Dumpty to stay with her former mistress and try to console her for the loss of her son Humpty. But Red Riding Hood and her cat had been through so much together that now when brighter days were come she could not bear to lose her. So I think she must be excused.

"Well, well, my dear," said Mother Dumpty. "I knew your dear mother when she was a little girl no bigger than you are, and I'm glad to think that Diddle is in such good hands."

"It was a lucky stroke for me," said Diddle Dumpty.

"You mustn't stay listening to the moaning and the groaning and the allaloning of an old woman or you'll never get to your grandmother's."

"And now," said Mother Dumpty, "you mustn't stay listening to the moaning and the groaning and the allaloning of an old woman or you'll never get to your grandmother's this fine summer's day. There's one thing, by the by, that you ought to look out for, and that's black witches. There are two real bad ones that have arrived in this part of the world lately. Old Mother Twitchett, one of the wickedest witches that ever lived, and a witch called Hink Minx that came from Thessaly with a wise man, his father, his mother, and a little girl who is known as Jumping Joan. Hink Minx is not as wicked as old Mother Twitchett; but she can be very nasty when she likes, and it's as well not to offend her."

With this good advice Mother Dumpty showed Red Riding Hood and Diddle Dumpty the direction to take that would help them to keep out of the way of Mother Twitchett. They bade her good-bye with many thanks, and a few minutes later they were walking in the shade of the first scattered trees of Tanglewood Coppice.

CHAPTER XII THE TWO WITCHES

CHAPTER XII THE TWO WITCHES

TANGLEWOOD COPPICE was the nearest part to Banbury Cross of the great forest that surrounded it, a forest so large that no human being had ever yet thoroughly explored it. You must not imagine that this forest, called the Old Forest as distinct from the New Forest, which, as every one knows, was made by William the Conqueror, consisted entirely of trees. There were plenty of open spaces of turf and heather, and there were many lakes and pools. Here and there were villages round which the land had been cleared and cultivated. Tanglewood Coppice occupied the slopes of and the valley between two ranges of low hills, and it consisted of gigantic beech trees on one slope and huge oaks on the other. Along the valley ran a mossy glade which led to Mother Hubbard's house. Old Mr. Hubbard had been one of the King's huntsmen, what nowadays we should call a keeper, and his widow was still allowed to enjoy the little house that stood on the far side of Tanglewood Coppice and looked out over a rolling heath. It was a lonely situation for an elderly person, but Mother Hubbard had such confidence in Buff, who was certainly the most intelligent dog that ever lived, that she did not bother about the loneliness; and except when she went to market, which was only once a fortnight, she saw nobody except Buff. It was strange that she never got the reputation of being a witch, especially with a dog that smoked, danced, played the flute, rode on goats, read newspapers, and even knew how to use a spinning-wheel. However, she never did get that reputation.

As for the two witches that did live in Tanglewood Coppice, I can assure you that I would never have taken tea with either of them. Old Mother Twitchett was the wickeder of the two.

Old Mother Twitchett had but one eye
And a long tail which she let fly;
And every time she went over a gap
She left a bit of her tail in a trap.

She lived in a hollow tree where Tanglewood Coppice joins the shadows of the Old Forest. Her one eye was a dreadful red by day and a horrible green by night. In addition to being a witch she was a were-wolf, which meant that whenever she liked she could change herself into a wolf, so that if she felt hungry all she had to do was to utter the magic words (which I don't intend to reveal in case you turn yourselves into wolves and remain wolves), after which she was fully equipped to devour anybody that crossed her path. Unluckily, or perhaps luckily, she had forgotten part of the charm that changed her back into an old woman again, so that she could never get rid of her tail, which was a great encumbrance to her in human shape. When she was a wolf, she could only attack people who crossed her path. She could not enter a house unless she was invited to come in, and she could not jump over any wall or hedge unless there was a gap. So anybody who feared her made a habit of setting traps in these gaps, in which, as the song says, her tail was continually getting caught. When Huntsman Hubbard died, he left his widow a particularly ferocious trap with teeth like a shark's, and this trap had bitten off an extra large piece of Mother Twitchett's tail when she tried to cross the gap in Mother Hubbard's garden hedge and bewitch her vegetables. The old sorceress was furious and vowed that she would have her revenge some day. Meanwhile she lived on in her hollow tree, a danger to all. People sometimes talked of having a witch hunt and burning her, but nothing was done.

This trap had bitten off an extra large piece of Mother Twitchett's tail when she tried to cross the gap in Mother Hubbard's garden-hedge and bewitch her vegetables.

Hink Minx, the other witch, came from Thessaly, which is a mountainous country north of Greece. Thessalian witches have always had a bad name throughout Europe. Their most famous accomplishment is being able to drag down the moon with their incantations. The original witches were personally taught by Dionysus, the god of wine, whom they worship by beating cymbals, dancing in leopard skins, and shrieking at the tops of their voices day and night.

There was a man of Thessaly,
And he was wondrous wise,
He jumped into a quickset hedge,
And scratch'd out both his eyes :
But when he saw his eyes were out,
With all his might and main
He jumped into another hedge,
And scratched them in again.

This man's name was Alexander, and the fame of his exploit was noised abroad all over Thessaly, so that when he returned to his native land he was considered the greatest oculist of the day. Hink Minx, a well-known Thessalian witch, suffered from an affliction of the eyes which caused her to wink perpetually. She visited Alexander to know if he could do anything to cure her, and he told her that the only way she could be cured was to come with him to Tanglewood Coppice and scratch out her eyes in the same quickset hedge that he had used. Alexander was as cunning as he was wise. He thought that, if he could persuade Hink Minx to travel with him, he could make vast sums by giving exhibitions of dragging down the moon. He took with him his old father and mother and a little girl called Jumping Joan, whose business it was to practise jumping with Hink Minx, so that when the quickset hedge was reached she would be able to jump properly. They wandered across Europe, but Alexander, for all his wisdom, had made a mistake in supposing that people would pay vast sums to see Hink Minx drag down the moon. On the contrary, people got very much annoyed, and wherever they travelled they were asked to move on as quickly as possible to another place.

At last, after many adventures in many countries, Alexander, his father, his mother Hink Minx the

witch, and little Jumping Joan arrived in Tanglewood Coppice, where, as ill luck would have it, they found that the famous quickset hedge had been eaten up by the King's deer. Hink Minx was furious at being brought all the way from Thessaly for nothing:

Hink Minx, the old witch, winks,
The fat begins to fry.
There's nobody at home but Jumping Joan,
Father, mother and I.

This was the song that Alexander, the wise man of Thessaly, sang every day. I'm not quite sure what he meant by singing "The fat begins to fry." But I suppose he meant that Hink Minx was beginning to get really angry. Just as we say now, "The fat's in the fire." He tried to reassure the angry old witch by promising to plant another quickset hedge as good as the first; but, unluckily, he planted sloes instead of quicks, and at the time when Red Riding Hood and Diddle Dumpty were walking through Tanglewood Coppice on the way to Mother Hubbard's the new hedge was still only nine inches high.

"I'm sick and tired of waiting," said the witch. "And my winking gets worse than ever. I'll take it out of the moon to-morrow night when he's full."

"Now, don't do that," Alexander begged. "You know how much it annoys people. We shall get chased away from here, and your winks will never be cured."

This argument was going on just when Red Riding Hood and Diddle Dumpty were walking past, and I can tell you that they hurried on as fast as their legs would carry them toward Mother Hubbard's house.

"I wonder what she's going to take out of the moon to-morrow night," Red Riding Hood said.

"Some of his purridge purrobably," Diddle Dumpty replied.

Soon after this they reached Mother Hubbard's house and knocked at the door.

"Pull the bobbin and the latch will fly up," the old lady called out from the inside.

"I'm sick and tired of waiting," said the witch. "And my winking gets worse than ever."

CHAPTER XIII MOTHER HUBBARD

CHAPTER XIII MOTHER HUBBARD

IT had taken longer to walk to her grandmother's cottage than Red Riding Hood had imagined, and by the time they had finished tea Mother Hubbard declared that it was much too late for her to think of letting a little girl go all the way home escorted by nothing more reliable than a cat.

"If it had been my Buff, it might have been different," said the old lady. "Buff could look after the Queen of Hearts herself. But then I couldn't spare you, could I, Buff?"

By the way, I ought to tell you that Mother Hubbard's famous dog was something between an Airedale terrier, a black and tan terrier, an Irish terrier, a Bedlington terrier, a fox terrier, a wire-haired terrier, a Skye terrier, an Aberdeen terrier, a West Highland terrier, a Cairns terrier, a Yorkshire terrier, a Manchester terrier, and a bull-terrier. Mother Hubbard called him a Tanglewood terrier, and perhaps that was as good a name for him as any.

Buff agreed with his mistress that he could not be spared to escort Red Riding Hood home.

"It wouldn't do for me to leave you bow-wow-now," he said decidedly. "We live in dangerous times. Witches and warlocks are abroad."

"But Mother will be so dreadfully anxious if I don't get home to-night," Red Riding Hood said. "I didn't even tell her that I was coming to visit you, Grannie."

Mother Hubbard called him a Tanglewood terrier.

"Your mother didn't mind running away and leaving her mother," said the old lady, who, I am sorry to say, had never really forgiven her daughter for running away with bold Riding Hood the highwayman.

Red Riding Hood did not know what to say to this, but she felt angry with her grandmother for talking like this about her own dear mother, felt so angry indeed that her red hair looked like fire, and I'm sure I don't know in what disrespectful way she might not have expressed her feelings if Diddle Dumpty had not offered to go back to Woodbine Cottage and tell Mrs. Riding Hood that her daughter was quite safe and would come home to-morrow morning.

"Well, I dare say that's the best solution," said the old lady. "I'll just give you a saucer of milk, and you can set out before twilight falls. I should have found it very difficult to put you up for the night, because Buff does not care to have anybody to sleep in his room. Do you, Buff?"

"Bow-wow-no," said Buff. "There certainly isn't room to swing a cat in this cottage."

"Swing yourself," Diddle Dumpty growled. "You'll be a thoroughbred terrier before you swing me-ow, and that's as good as if I said never."

"Buff doesn't want to be a thoroughbred terrier," said Mother Hubbard. "He's a thoroughbread-and-butter terrier, which is much grander. Isn't it, Buff?"

But Buff did not dare to say too much, for he noticed a funny look in Diddle Dumpty's eyes, and he was afraid of getting his nose boxed if he did not take care.

Diddle Dumpty was so indignant at the idea of being swung that she stalked out of Mother Hubbard's

house with her tail in the air and would not condescend to touch the milk.

"I shall call for you to-morrow morning," she turned round in the doorway to tell her little mistress. "Don't worry about me. I shall get some decent miousing on the way."

Presently they heard the strains of her fiddle getting fainter and fainter in the wood. She was playing the Cat's Fugue by Scarlatti, which made Buff feel jealous, for he could only play five-pad exercises on his flute, and of those only the very simplest written for one paw.

"Now, Buff," said Mother Hubbard, who saw that he was feeling rather small, "you can take my granddaughter to your bedroom to wash her hands for supper."

Buff wagged his tail proudly and led the way to his room at the back of the cottage, where Red Riding Hood was astonished to see that he lived in the greatest comfort with everything and more that the most pampered dog could wish. His bed was strewn with the finest wheaten straw, and on the table next to it there was a basin of cold soup and a large marrow-bone in case he was hungry during the night. The walls were hung with portraits of famous dogs like Good Dog Tray and Bethgelert, the hound that

"Diddle Dumpty only learnt to play when she was staying with Mother Goose."

died in defence of his master's child. There were framed texts too, such as *Let sleeping dogs lie; Every dog has his day; It's dogged that does it; Give a dog a bad name and hang him; Love me, love my dog;* and *Help a lame dog over a stile.* A cupboard in the wall was full of rubber balls and dogwood sticks, and the carpet was woven of some special stuff that could be chewed for ever without getting worn out. A bowl of dog-roses and dog-violets stood on the window-sill, and there was a glass-fronted kennel in which was kept a collection of obsolete implements of torture like muzzles, whips, and leads. On the toilet table was a fox's brush, a cock's comb, a paw-glass, a dog-watch, and an almanac of the dog-days. Above the bed hung a shelf of dog-eared books in dog-Latin and doggerel.

"Where did your cat learn to play the fiddle like that?" Buff asked, as he poured out some water into the basin for Red Riding Hood to wash her hands.

"Please are you Mr. Dock the clockmaker?"

"But I suppose she has studied mewsic ever since she was a kitten. Of course, I only took up the flute quite recently."

She went to the fruiterer's
To buy me some fruit;
And when she came back,
I was playing the flute.

"Oh, no," said Red Riding Hood. "Diddle Dumpty only learnt to play when she was staying with Mother Goose. Hasn't she made splendid progress?"

"Well, of course, cats are usually fonder of mewsic than dogs," said Buff. "However, I'm learning a barkarolle on my flute which I shall be able to play pretty soon, and after that I shall devote myself to Bach and Wagner. I've had so much to do that my mewsic has been a bit neglected. Can your cat read? Here's my little library of dog-Latin and doggerel. I'm fairly fluent in both languages."

"Oh, I shall die of laughing," the clock wheezed. "Oh, my cogs and wheels! I can't be tick-tick-tickled like this."

"Diddle Dumpty reads Catin well," said Red Riding Hood, who was not going to allow Buff any more accomplishments than her cat. "And of course she speaks Purrsian fluently."

Buff said no more after this, but escorted Red Riding Hood downstairs to supper.

When it was time to go to bed, Mother Hubbard told her grand-daughter that she should have to make her up a bed on two chairs in the kitchen. Red Riding Hood was not at all sorry, for she had not

looked forward to spending the night with her grandmother, who was so rheumatic that all her joints squeaked whenever she moved.

Red Riding Hood was never sure if she had been to sleep and woken up again, or if she had never been to sleep at all when the adventures of this night began to happen.

The first odd event was that the grandfather clock, which had been saying 'Tick-tick! Tick-tick!' just like any other clock, began to say 'Hickory-tick-tick!' and then 'Hickory-tick-tock! Dickory-tick-tock!' and then 'Hickory Dickory Dock!' Now Hickory Dickory Dock was the name of the clockmaker in Banbury, and when Red Riding Hood looked at the face of the clock, which she could just see by the glow of the dying fire, she perceived that it was very like the face of Mr. Dock himself.

"Please, are you Mr. Dock the clockmaker?" she asked timidly.

"No, no, I'm Hickory's grandfather," said the clock. "I lost time years ago, and I've been a clock ever since."

Suddenly the clock began to wheeze and groan.

"What is the matter?" Red Riding Hood asked in alarm.

"Oh, it's tick-tick-tick-tickling me," said the clock.

"What's tickling you?"

"Oh, I shall die of laughing," the clock wheezed. "Oh, my cogs and wheels! I can't be tick-tick-tickled like this."

Hickory Dickory Dock!
The mouse run up the clock;
The clock struck one
And down the mouse run,
Hickory Dickory Dock!

And at that moment the clock did strike one, after which it went on tick-ticking as if nothing had happened.

Red Riding Hood heard the pitter-pat of frightened little feet scurrying away over the kitchen floor. She shivered, because she was rather frightened of mice, and she wished that Diddle Dumpty was at hand to protect her. However, she had not much time to be frightened before she was aware that all sorts of funny little noises were going on around her, strange little whisperings and scratchings and tinklings and murmurings, and then she distinctly saw the poker get up and walk across the hearth very stiffly to where the tongs were lying down beside the shovel.

" Look at her in her brass skirt. She's too dainty to put coal on."

Long legs, crooked thighs ;
Little head, and no eyes,

said Poker scornfully.

" Go away and don't insult me," Tongs snapped.

" You've no business to be over there with Miss Shovel," said Poker. " You just lie there all day doing nothing while I do the work."

" And look at her ! " squeaked a dumpy little coal-scoop, popping out of the coal-box. " Look at her in her brass skirt. She's too dainty to put coal on. But I'm sick of it. I shall crack to-morrow. She'll have to be used then, and we'll soon see if her brass skirt looks as bright as it does now."

"Take that, you brazen-faced idler."

"Go away, you vulgar creature," said Miss Shovel. "Do please, dear Mr. Tongs, make that vulgar Scoop go back into the coal-box."

"Look here, Tongs, don't you interfere," said Poker. "You're just as useless as Miss Shovel."

"Miss Shovel and I are engaged to be married," said Tongs grandly, and with this he got up and stalked up and down the hearth in a passion, turning round occasionally to put out his tongs at Poker.

"Take that, you brazen-faced idler," shouted Poker, and in another minute they were at it poker and tongs, making such a terrible clatter that Red Riding Hood expected to hear her grandmother call out to know what was happening.

"I wish you'd scrape the soot off your leg before you start fighting," said Tongs. "You're covering me with your nasty blacks."

"Well, fight fair, and don't pinch," said Poker, whose nose was red with rage.

Miss Shovel had also risen by now and was leaning over and weeping hysterically, because the Scoop was pelting her with lumps of coal.

"Tongs is quite right," said a Pot who was watching the fray. "That horrid, stuck-up, awkward Poker is as black as the Kettle."

"Did you dare to call me black, you hussy?" hissed the Kettle, who until this moment had been sitting on the hob, humming pompously to herself and

craning her neck from time to time to see what was going on down below.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed a lot of little Tea-cups on the dresser. "Fancy the Pot calling the Kettle black!"

"Hold your handles," said a Plate, "you Tea-cups make more noise than the rest of us put together."

"Kindly leave my children alone," said the Tea-

"Some of this cheap crockery is really insufferable," said Mrs. Tea-Pot to her friend Miss Milk-Jug.

Pot. "They've a perfect right to comment on the Pot's rudeness to their Aunt Kettle. You forget that Madame Kettle is my sister."

"Well, you're a Pot yourself, aren't you?" said the Plate rudely. "You may call yourself Tea-Pot with a hyphen; but you're only an ordinary Pot when all's said and done. You belong to the Pot family."

"Some of this cheap crockery is really insufferable," said Mrs. Tea-Pot to her friend Miss Milk-Jug.

A large copper walked in from the scullery and arrested the tumult.

"Don't you spout at me, you old frump," the Plate snapped.

Red Riding Hood felt inclined to tell them all to be quiet and let her go to sleep again, for the noise was becoming louder every minute, as more utensils took part in the quarrel. Two Fire-Dogs were snarling at each other, and a pair of Bellows fanned the angry passions of the mob.

The Dish jumped on top of the Table
To see the Pot wash the Ladle;
The Spit that stood behind a bench
Called the Dishcloth a dirty wench;
"Ods plut," says the Gridiron,
"Can't ye agree?
I'm the Head Constable,
Bring 'em to me."

On which a large Copper walked in from the scullery and arrested the tumult, although he did not succeed in arresting any of the rioters.

When Red Riding Hood was dozing off in the quiet that succeeded the entrance of the Copper, she came back from sleep with a start to hear a whispered conversation being carried on close to the chairs on which she was lying, and down on the floor she saw an extremely good-looking Dish upon his knees before a Spoon. It was not the Dish who had jumped on the table to see the Pot wash the Ladle. This was a

Crown Derby Dish beautifully dressed in blue, red, and gold and connected with the best blood in China.

"Sweet Spoon," the Dish was saying, "although you are a dessert Spoon, do not forsake me. Cling to me, sweet Spoon. Elope with me and escape from the hateful marriage arranged for you by your parents."

Red Riding Hood could see that the Spoon's face was shining with love of the Dish, and she wondered who her parents were and to whom they intended to marry her.

"Fork is so persistent, dearest Dish," the Spoon murmured. "I know not how to resist him. He sticks to one so sharply. Besides, my father, the Carving Knife, has sworn to cut anybody in half who stands in the way of his plans."

"He cannot cut me in half," said the Dish proudly. "He could only scratch me. Be brave and fly with me to-morrow night. Nobody will notice you in the spoonlight, for you will look like a spoonbeam yourself, and as for me I will bowl along so fast that the sharpest Knife in the world would not be able to catch me. Do not hesitate, beloved Spoon. Promise me that you will dare all for the sake of our love. Far from this turbulent and noisy kitchen we will fly to some remote shelf and there spend the rest of our life in peace and happiness."

"Beloved Dish," the Spoon declared. "I am only a timorous girl. And then—and then,—oh, how can I confess to you the dreadful truth? Dish, I am not silver. I am only plate. My father is ambitious. The Fork for whom he intends me is genuine silver, and old silver into the bargain."

"Do you wish me to become cracked?" the Dish demanded passionately. "Do you wish me to go

utterly to pieces? What care I if you be plate or silver? I love you. In fact, as plate you will be more suited to become the wife of a Dish."

"Oh, adored Dish, if I only had the courage to elope with you."

"You will, you will. When the clock strikes one to-morrow and the usual row begins, utter a faint tinkle and I shall be by your side, ready to escort you out into the spoonlight. Hush! We are observed," said the Dish nervously.

Red Riding Hood was anxious to tell the Dish that he need not have the least fear of being betrayed by her. But somehow she could not manage to utter a single word before she was fast asleep. When she woke once more, the kitchen was absolutely silent. For the third or fourth time she was dozing off again when the fire, which had been glowing dully, danced into flame. Sitting up on her chairs, she saw that a small black figure was sitting on the hob and puffing the embers to life.

"Puck!" Red Riding Hood cried gleefully.

"No, it's not Puck," said the black figure. happen to be the Hobgoblin who lives here."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," said Red Riding Hood.

"No need for apologies. Would you like a ride?"

"Where to?"

"Why, up the chimney of course," said the Hobgoblin.

"But how should we go up the chimney?"

"Why, on the smoke of course."

"Would it bear me?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"Bear you? Of course it will bear you if you lion it carefully. Look at the way the sparks are travelling up."

Red Riding Hood did not feel quite sure that she

could be considered the same weight as a spark. But after her high flight with the Lark she did not fear an ascent on smoke, and getting out of her chair-bed she took the Hobgoblin's hand and jumped up on the hob beside him. A minute later she was experiencing the delicious sensation of ascending a chimney on smoke.

"How fast the sparks travel!" she exclaimed. "Much faster than we do."

"There's such keen competition amongst them," the Hobgoblin explained.

"What are they competing for?"

"Each spark hopes to be a star. Of course, only one in several quintillions succeeds. Most of them get burnt out even before they reach the top of the chimney. Hullo, we're out ourselves!"

Red Riding Hood had enjoyed nothing so much as this since her ride in Santa Claus' sleigh. And, in fact, I do not suppose that anything better can be fancied than to sway gently on top of a coil of smoke in the balmy air of a fine summer's night. The Hobgoblin had been right about the sparks. There were very few to be seen now of those bright little beings that had danced past Red Riding Hood up the chimney.

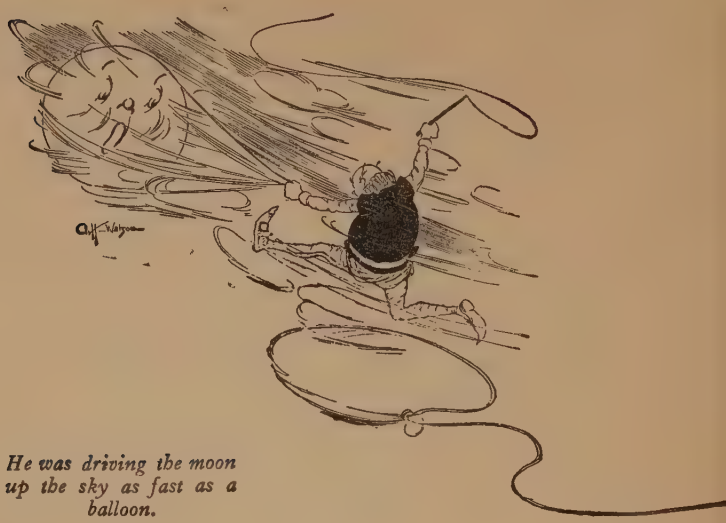
"Hullo, what's that?" the Hobgoblin exclaimed. "Something swished past my face."

"It wasn't the old woman who sweeps the cobwebs off the sky, was it?" Red Riding Hood suggested.

"No, she isn't sweeping this part of the sky to-night. She swept round here last night. Hullo, there it goes again!"

This time Red Riding Hood felt something whirl past.

"It must be an owl," she said.



He was driving the moon up the sky as fast as a balloon.

Before the Hobgoblin had time to agree or disagree with her, there came up from the earth beneath a most horrible sound of yelling.

"It's Hink Minx," cried the Hobgoblin. "She's trying to drag down the moon."

The man in the moon evidently realized his danger, for he was driving the moon up the sky as fast as a balloon. The screaming and howling down below was louder than ever, and now Red Riding Hood perceived that what had whirled past her and the Hobgoblin was a large lassoo that was being flung by somebody underneath, evidently in the hope of lassooing the moon.

"Look out!" the Hobgoblin shouted.

But it was too late. The lassoo curled round Red Riding Hood, and in a second she was whipped off the coil of smoke and being hauled rapidly back to earth.

"I've got him! I've got him," she heard a triumphant voice crying.

"No, you haven't," said Red Riding Hood, who found herself on the earth again at that moment, at least not exactly on the earth itself, because she was caught in the branches of a big tree.

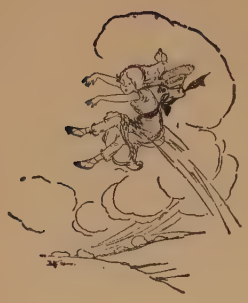
"What have I got then?" cried Hink Minx, for it was the witch herself.

"You've got me," Red Riding Hood said.

"Who are you?"

"I'm Mother Hubbard's granddaughter, Red Riding Hood."

She heard a mutter of voices on the ground, and then suddenly there was a noise like the bouncing of an india-rubber ball, and immediately afterward there was sitting on the other end of the bough to which she was clinging a little girl not so big as herself.



Little Jumping Joan.

It was now Red Riding Hood's turn to say "Who are you?"

Here am I, said the newcomer,
Little Jumping Joan,
When nobody's with me
I'm always alone.

"What a silly remark," said Red Riding Hood. "I don't need to be told that. But who asked you to jump up here?"

"Hink Minx, the old winking witch, made me," said Joan. "She was trying to drag down the man in the moon, and she was furious when she found she had missed him. I wish I had a friend like you. I do so hate being always alone."

And poor little Jumping Joan suddenly burst into tears.

"I left all my playmates in Thessaly when Mr. Alexander brought me here. Oh, I do wish I could escape."

"Well, let's escape," said Red Riding Hood. "I'll help you."

"Joan," came up the voice of Hink Minx, and I can assure you that the voice of a black witch when she is angry is a sound to strike terror into the boldest heart, for it is a sound like the grumble of an angry keeper, the rasp of a saw, the hiss of a serpent, and the clank of a garden-roller. "Joan," said this voice. "Jump down at once and tell me who it is you are talking to."

"Keep quiet," Red Riding Hood whispered. "Don't answer her. Don't say a word."

The old witch muttered to herself for a moment or two, and then she began to shake the tree as hard as she could. She shook and she shook and she shook and she shook until at last she did manage to shake down Red Riding Hood, but not Joan, who jumped with all her might and main into another tree.

How Red Riding Hood did run, and how Hink Minx ran, too! And all the time they were running Joan kept pace with them by jumping from tree to tree overhead. At last just as the skinny fingers of Hink Minx were going to grip Red Riding Hood's shoulder, she saw her grandmother's cottage, and with one desperate bound she bounded right back into bed, where she lay with beating heart until it was dawn, and a cock crowed the hour when witches lose all their power. With a sigh of relief she turned over and slept soundly. When she woke again the sun was shining in at the window, and the hands of the grandfather clock were at eight.

CHAPTER XIV SUCH SPORT

RED RIDING HOOD asked anxiously, when Diddle Dumpty arrived back from Woodbine Cottage, if her mother had been worried or angry at her absence, and she was much relieved to hear that Puck had paid her a short visit and assured her that playing truant from Mistress Contrary's school was one good way of starting to make Banbury Cross Banbury Gay again.

The news that the cat brought made the prospect of the walk back in the freshness of the summer morning a delight. Red Riding Hood promised, before she said good-bye to her grandmother, that she would soon come and pay her another visit. She did not say a word to Mother Hubbard about the quarrelling of the kitchen utensils or the behaviour of the witch, because she was afraid of making her nervous. She and Diddle Dumpty had not gone a hundred yards of the way back, and Diddle Dumpty had just finished singing:

The cat came fiddling out of a barn,
With a pair of bagpipes under her arm;
She could sing nothing but fiddle-de-dee,
The mouse has married the humble-bee;
Pipe, cat—— dance, mouse——
We'll have a wedding at our good house—

when they heard the pitter-pat of pawsteps behind them and, looking round, saw that it was Buff.

"I say, you two," said Buff, "can't we have some sport to-night? Why don't you bring all the boys and girls at the school back here and make a regular night of it?"

"Oh, what fun!" Red Riding Hood cried. "But what would Grandmama say?"

"The Dame would be all right. I'd soon bark her round," said Buff. "We really live too quietly out here, and we want something to wake us up."

"Well, if I can persuade them to come, I will," Red Riding Hood promised. "But it's very difficult to persuade them to do anything."

"Try your best," said Buff. "Bye-bye, Diddle."

And with a low bow-wow he turned back.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when Red Riding Hood walked up the path of Mistress Contrary's garden, and it was striking the hour when she entered the schoolroom, singing as she had sung the day before:

A dillar! A dollar!
A ten o'clock scholar.

Miss Contrary gazed at her severely for a moment before she enquired in a sarcastic voice:

What makes you come so soon?
You used to come at ten o'clock,
But now you come at noon.

The other children looked at Red Riding Hood over the tops of their slates. She made up her mind to do what she had done yesterday and escape, but Jack Horner, at a sign from the mistress, jumped up from his desk and ran across the schoolroom to lock the door. At the same moment Johnny Green took up his stand by the window to prevent her jumping out that way.

"Jill Trot," Mistress Contrary commanded, "uncork the largest pickle-jar and bring me the rod."

Poor Red Riding Hood simply did not know what to do. All her friends—Santa Claus, Mother Goose, Puck—were so far away that she could hardly believe that they really existed at all, still less that they could come to her aid.

There was a tremendous pop as Jill Trot drew the cork of the pickle-jar, and Mistress Contrary's sharp eyes grew sharper every instant. It was worse than

There's no knowing what you can do till you try.

being chased by Hink Minx. And then, just as Mistress Contrary was going to seize her, Red Riding Hood remembered little Jumping Joan, and jumped. There's no knowing what you can do till you try, and I can assure you that Red Riding Hood had no idea that she could jump like that until she tried. Of course, she could not jump as well as Joan, but she could jump well enough to jump over Mistress Contrary's head and over the desks and over the blackboard and over the forms. How she jumped! Backward and forward, while the class sat staring at her with eyes open wide in astonishment. At last, with one lucky bound, she landed right on top of Jack

Horner, who sank to the floor with a dull thud. Red Riding Hood was on her feet in a moment, and, unlocking the schoolroom door, she ran home as fast as she was able.

Mrs. Riding Hood was rather vexed at first by her daughter's behaviour, but she could not help admitting that the circumstances in which they had come to live in Banbury Cross were unusual.

"If I'd been intended to be good," Red Riding Hood argued, "you'd have had a visit from Puck when I was naughty. But he wanted me to be naughty. He told me always to remember to be a naughty little girl."

Mrs. Riding Hood sighed; she did not feel that her remonstrances would be of the least use.

"I'm so afraid that you'll get selfish," she said, "and run away from me as I ran away from my mother."

"I wouldn't ever run away from you, Mother darling," Red Riding Hood declared. "Running away from Mistress Contrary's school isn't the same as running away from you."

Red Riding Hood spent that afternoon playing in the garden with Diddle Dumpty. Now the garden of Woodbine Cottage was overlooked from the road, and all through the afternoon the grown-up inhabitants of Banbury Cross were coming to stare over the fence at the little girl who had played truant and defied Mistress Contrary. Red Riding Hood might have been some rare bird or beast to judge by the interest her behaviour seemed to have aroused. Diddle Dumpty insisted that she was the cause of some of this tremendous amount of attention, and she played all the solos she knew. But the people only shook their heads sadly and muttered to one another:

"Dear me! What a terrible caterwauling to be sure!"

No, it was really and truly Red Riding Hood who was the centre of attraction; and the excitement became positively acute when at half-past four Jack Horner and Johnny Green left the school, carrying between them an enormous piece of folded notepaper addressed to Mrs. Riding Hood. I say 'notepaper,' because Mistress Contrary, true to her name, had put the envelope inside the notepaper, addressed the notepaper, and written the letter on the envelope. Jack Horner and Johnny Green propped the communication against the gate of Woodbine Cottage and ran away without waiting for an answer. As a matter of fact there was no answer, but their conduct in running away was not less rude on that account.

This was what was written on the envelope:

Mistress Mary Quite Contrary begs to inform
Mrs. Riding Hood that her daughter has been

EXPELLED

from Mistress M. Q. Contrary's Excessively Select
School for Young Ladies and Gentlemen.

"Hip-hip-hurrah!" Red Riding Hood shouted when she heard the news.

"Hip-hip-purrah!" Diddle Dumpty echoed.

"What fun it would be," Red Riding Hood said, "if we could persuade the other children to be really naughty for once."

"It ought to be easy enough to purrsuade them," said Diddle Dumpty.

It happened that just when twilight was falling Red Riding Hood went for a walk in the village and met Willie Winkie with Sammy Stout. These two boys had always been her favourites, and when she

Boys and girls, come out to play.

found that they did not run away from her as some of the other children had done, she asked them if they would not like to have an adventure that very night.

"What sort of an adventure?" Willie Winkie asked.

Red Riding Hood gave them a short account of her own adventures the night before, and both boys agreed that it would be very exciting to see Hink Minx drag down the moon.

"I don't suppose all of us will come," said Sammy Stout. "But Willie and I will come, and I expect Tom Piper will, and perhaps his sister Dolly."

"Listen," said Red Riding Hood. "When it's really dark, I'll come round to each house in turn and sing, and those that want to come with me can come, and those that want to stay at home, well, they can just stay at home, that's all."

It was about half-past nine when Red Riding Hood stood by the gate of the Winkies' house and told Diddle Dumpty to strike up:

Boys and girls, come out to play,
The moon doth shine as bright as day,
Leave your supper and leave your sleep
And come to your playfellows in the street.

Come with a shout and come with a bound,
To dance in the moonlight round and round,
Come with a whoop and come with a call,
Come with a good will, or come not at all.

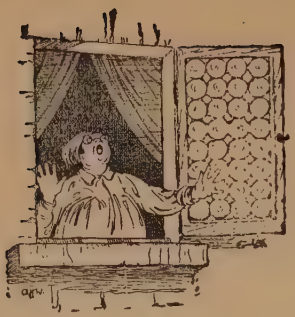
She could see Willie Winkie's shadow dancing on the blind.

Up the ladder and down the wall,
A halfpenny loaf will serve us all.

A moment later Willie Winkie's tangled yellow head appeared over the garden wall, and in a moment he and Red Riding Hood were running down the village street to summon the other children.

They had no difficulty in tempting out Sammy Stout, and they had no difficulty with the Pipers, especially when Dolly was told that she could bring her cow with her. Boy Blue and Betty Blue could not resist the invitation; and even little Polly Flinders managed to climb out through the chimney of the blacksmith's forge and join the merry party. Of course, with every new arrival the singing became more enticing, so that it was not surprising to find Jack and Jill Trot leaving their grandmother to snore by herself. Margery Daw came; and Tom Tucker, who sang so sweetly that Elsie Marley, Lucy Lockett, Kitty Fisher, and Bo Peep were enchanted by his voice and forgot all about rules and regulations. Johnny Green jeered at the party first of all; but both he and Willy Bell found that the singing was too much for them, and, in fact, the only failure was with Jack Horner, who leant out of his bedroom window and preached a sermon about obedience and diligence and the advantages of being good and the terrible penalties for being naughty.

"Oh, my children," he said in his oily voice, "do



"Oh, listen, my children, to me."

not be led away by that wicked girl, who has already caused our beloved mistress so much grief. Remember that only good children get the good things of this world. Remember the immortal words of the poet:

When the children have been good,
That is, be it understood,
Good at mealtimes, good at play,
Good all night and good all day,
They shall have the pretty things
That Merry Christmas always brings.

"Oh, listen, my children, to me," he went on. "Do not listen to her. Of what use will one half-penny loaf be among so many?"

Charley Wagg, Robert Rowley, and Georgie Porgie were all three rather shaken by this. But Red Riding Hood, turning quickly to Dolly Piper and Elsie Marley, said:

You'll find milk, and you'll find flour,
And we'll have a pudding in half an hour.

"A pudding?" Jack Horner cried. "What's a pudding without plums?"

"We've got plums," said Diddle Dumpty. "I've been up our plum-tree all the afternoon."

"Pooh! That kind of plum's no use for a pudding," said Jack Horner, who had been quite taken aback when Diddle Dumpty first spoke.

"Don't let's stand here arguing with him," Willie Winkie cried. "We shall miss all the fun of the dark, which is twice as much fun as the fun of the fair. Anyway, we don't want Jack Horner, because if we did have a plum pudding, he'd eat all the plums before any of us got one."

"No, I wouldn't," said Jack Horner. "And I'll tell your father of you, Willie Winkie. I'll go right round next door and tell him what you're going to do."

> "*Tell Tale Tit*," all the children cried,
> "*Your tongue shall be slit,*
> *And all the cats and dogs in town*
> *Shall have a little bit.*"

"Thank you," said Diddle Dumpty scornfully. "But I don't want any of his nasty tongue."

"I'll pay you out for that," Jack Horner threatened. "You see if I don't. You'll wish you'd been drowned as a kitten before I've done with you."

However, nobody bothered about Jack Horner when they were on the road to Tanglewood Coppice in the moonlight, least of all Diddle Dumpty. To be sure, Johnny Green looked over his shoulder once or twice as if he half repented of playing his leader false. But not even he turned back. On the way they called for Bernard Bunting and Tommy Tittlemouse, who were both delighted to come.

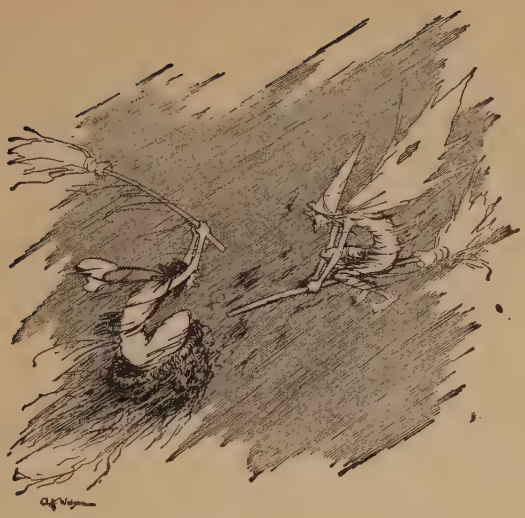
Mother Hubbard was a little put about when her cottage was invaded by so many children; but Buff was evidently so pleased to have company that she made herself as agreeable as she could, and she even let her visitors use the kitchen range to bake their pudding.

After supper Buff was given special permission to accompany the others on their frolic under the moon.

Billy and Buttercup danced a goatillion together.

Dolly Piper's cow, whose name was Buttercup, pranced about and made great friends with Billy, Buff's goat. Buff himself played Hoffman's famous Barkarolle on his flute, and Diddle Dumpty some pieces by a modern French composer called Depussy, while Billy and Buttercup danced a goatillion together. Buttercup and Diddle Dumpty had an argument about whether it was really 'mewsic' or 'moosic,' which kept them busy when they were not dancing, Diddle Dumpty the cachucha and Buttercup the hornpipe.

It would take a whole book to tell you about half the mischief the children of Banbury Cross got into that night. They certainly made up for months of being good by being as naughty as possible, now that Jack Horner's influence was removed. They rushed about the moonlit heath, screaming and shrieking at the tops of their voices; they jumped over hedges and ditches. By the way, they invited little Jumping Joan to join their party, and you may be sure that they were all anxious to jump as well as she could. She made particular friends with Betty Blue, and felt much less lonely in consequence. At last, tired out by so much violent exercise, they all sat down to rest inside a fairy ring. They were no sooner within this magic spot than they were able to see all sorts of things that they could not see before. It is true that they did not see any fairies, but that was because the ground hereabout was haunted by witches.



" Be off ! Be off, you old scarecrow ! "

When Red Riding Hood had told the other children about Hink Minx, they had not really believed her, and Johnny Green had done nothing all night but make sneering remarks about people who let their fancies run away with them. But now, when they were sitting in the fairy ring playing what is called a quiet game, which usually means one in which everybody quarrels with his neighbour how it ought to be played, suddenly Tom Piper called out :

" I say, look at the moon ! "

And certainly the moon was behaving in a most extraordinary way, for it was shivering like a jelly and turning bluer every minute. Not only that, but it was opening its mouth as wide as it could ; and,

although they could not hear the words, all the children could plainly see that it was shouting 'Help! Help!'

Presently an old woman in a steeple-hat, seated on a gigantic broomstick, swept past; and as she did so another old woman, also in a steeple-hat, driving a basket and waving a broom, swept down from the opposite direction to meet her.

"Be off! Be off, you old scarecrow!" cried the old woman in a basket. "This is my sky, and if you frighten the moon, it'll turn quite blue and then go out, and I shan't be able to see the cobwebs."

Hink Minx, for of course the old woman riding the broomstick was she, guided her steed to attack the other old woman, and a most thrilling fight took place, which ended in a victory for Hink Minx, at which the moon grew bluer than ever and tried to roll off up the sky.

"Not to-night," Hink Minx shouted. "I'll have you down, I'll have you down."

Whereupon she flung her lassoo and fairly hooked the poor moon. Down it was dragged, down and down until it was almost on the earth. Buttercup, the Piper cow, grew very excited, and at last leapt right over it. Diddle Dumpty played a tune on her fiddle. Buff held his sides with laughter. In fact, he had not laughed so heartily since Mother Hubbard

Went to the joiner's
To buy him a coffin,
But when she came back,
The poor dog was laughing.

Luckily for the moon, when it seemed as if Hink Minx must drag it right down, so that it would go bowling about the earth like a big blue balloon, the

Singing in the moonlight.

lassoo broke and it went sailing up the sky again covered with a mass of cobwebs through which it had been dragged.

And at this moment Red Riding Hood pointed out to her playmates that the Dish was eloping with the Spoon. How the two of them ran, and behind them in full chase pelted all the utensils of Mother Hubbard's kitchen. Tongs ran the fastest because he had the longest legs; but perhaps because he was engaged to Miss Shovel he did not try to catch the lovers. The fierce Carving Knife and Fork could not run because they kept sticking into the ground, and though the Copper bowled along shouting 'Stop, thief!' he was not perfectly round, and so instead of bowling straight, he went bowling off to one side all the time. Several other Dishes, jealous of the Crown Derby Dish, were in hot pursuit; but they soon cracked, and of course there was nothing to be feared from such a clumsy collection as the Pots and the Pans. So the lovers escaped, much to the delight of the children, who all said they had had a most wonderful evening, and went home hand in hand singing in the moonlight, or as much moonlight as was shed by a very blue and dusty moon:

Hey, Diddle, Diddle!
The Cat and the Fiddle!
The Cow jumped over the Moon;
The little Dog laughed to see such sport;
And the Dish ran away with the Spoon.

CHAPTER XV GENERAL NAUGHTINESS

THERE is no doubt that the children of Banbury Cross all began to be naughty after that famous visit in the moonlight to Mother Hubbard's cottage. For the rest of the term scarcely one of them did a stroke of work, and Mistress Contrary had to uncork all her birch rods and use them so much that by the time term was over there was not a twig left on one of them. As soon as the holidays began, many of the boys and girls in Banbury Cross had to do other work. Tom Piper and Boy Blue were both engaged by Farmer Muffet, and Bo Peep helped her father look after the sheep on the same farm. Even Mr. Marley the miller, who was quite a rich man, made his daughter Elsie help with the pigs, and Peter Piper was apprenticed to Mr. Wagg the grocer. Jack and Jill Trot had to do a good deal of work for their grandmother, Dame Trot. Johnny Green was set to weed for his father in the Rectory garden.

It did not so much matter to the grown-ups of Banbury Cross when the children were idle and naughty in school. But when they misbehaved themselves at home it was different. The first thing that upset the grown-ups' peace was when little Jane Muffet had a screaming fit, because a spider came and frightened her.

Little Miss Muffet sat on a tuffet,
Eating of curds and whey;
There came a great spider and sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away.

Now, Jane Muffet had been told by her mother never to sit on tuffets. Mrs. Muffet was a woman who wanted to be grander than she really was. She would not allow her little girl to go to school with the

"How many times, Jane, have I told you not to sit on tuffets?"

other village children, and she always insisted that the farm hands should call her daughter Miss Muffet instead of Jane, which was rather silly and snobbish of her.

"How many times, Jane, have I told you not to sit on tuffets?" Mrs. Muffet exclaimed. "You must remember who you are and try to behave like a little lady and sit on chairs, not on common tuffets, which are only fit for labourers' children, not farmers' daughters."

The more severely her mother spoke to her, the more loudly Jane screamed and shrieked. She was in an odious mess, because she had upset the curds and whey all over her clean pinafore, and her new muslin frock was quite green from sitting on tuffets.

She made such a noise with her screams and yells that her father came running in from the fields to know what was the matter. While he was consoling his little daughter, because fathers are not so strict with their daughters as mothers are, Hickory Dickory Dare, the man in brown, who looked after the pigs, came in to say that Tom Piper had stolen the fattest of the little ones.

Tom, Tom, the Piper's son,
Stole a pig and away he run,

said Hickory.

"Which pig?" asked the farmer.

A long-tailed pig or a short-tailed pig,
Or a pig without any tail?
A sow pig or a boar pig,
Or a pig with a curly tail?

"A sucking pig," Hickory told his master.

Now Hickory was a most capable pigman, and famous all over the country for the way he could deal with runaway pigs. When Buttercup, the Piper cow, came home after jumping over the moon, she had made all the other animals in Banbury Cross jealous of her feat with her feet; and one of Farmer Muffet's pigs had tried to fly.

Hickory Dickory Dare!
The pig flew up in the air,
But the man in brown soon brought him down,
Hickory Dickory Dare!

But Hickory never managed to get back the pig that Tom Piper stole, for when he arrived at the Piper's house

The pig was eat,
And Tom was beat,
And Tom went roaring down the street.

But that didn't give Farmer Muffet back his fat little porker.

The next day, Boy Blue, who had been put to look after the cows, fell asleep

Tom went roaring down the street.

under a haycock. Everybody came running in to say that the sheep had got into the meadow and that the cows were eating up the corn as fast as they could. You can imagine how angry Farmer Muffet was when he heard this. He rushed out from his dinner and shouted at the top of his voice:

Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn!
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.
Where is the boy that looks after the sheep?

And everybody shouted together:

He's under the haycock, fast asleep.

Well, will you wake him? Farmer Muffet commanded angrily, and the head cowman replied:

No, not I;
For if I do he'll be sure to cry.

"Yes, by Jumbo!" Farmer Muffet shouted, "and I'll give him something to cry for, by Jumbo!"

I don't know what Boy Blue was dreaming about under the haycock, but the worst dream ever dreamt could not have been half as bad as the thrashing he got from Farmer Muffet.

"It wasn't my fault," he blubbered. "You never told me to look after the sheep, farmer. You only told me to look after the cows. It's Bo Peep's fault if the sheep are in the meadow."

"But it's your fault," said Farmer Muffet, "if the cows are in the corn."

"No, and it isn't," sobbed Boy Blue. "It's the fault of the Piper's cow."

There was a piper, he'd a cow,
And he'd no hay to give her;
He took his pipes and played a tune,
Consider, old cow, consider;

The cow considered very well,
For she gave the piper a penny
That he might play the tune again
Of 'Corn-rigs are bonnie!'

"My corn-rigs won't be bonnie," said Farmer Muffet angrily. "They've trampled down a whole field of wheat."

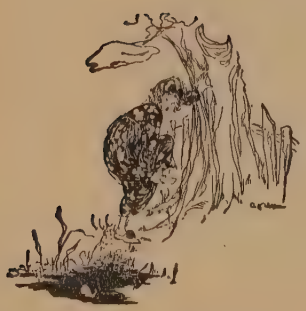
"The pig flew up in the air last week."

"It wasn't my fault," Boy Blue continued to sob, "because nothing would content the Pipers' cow after she jumped over the moon that night but that she must learn to dance. She bragged about it so much that all your cows began dancing, too. And then the pig flew up in the air last week, which made the cows worse than ever. They thought that if they could get at the wheat and eat like pigs, they could fly like pigs."

"No more excuses," Farmer Muffet said, cutting him short. "You are dismissed from my employment."

You can imagine how slowly Boy Blue crept home to tell his father that Farmer Muffet had turned him off the farm.

As ill-luck would have it, his sister Betty, who had been given a pair of new shoes for the holidays, had gone out to practise jumping with little Joan. She had made friends with her that night at Mother Hubbard's, and Joan had begged Betty to keep her company. Little Tommy Tittlemouse, who was as usual catching fishes in other people's ditches, dared the girls to jump over one of Farmer Muffet's ditches. Joan jumped over successfully, because she was used to jumping; but Betty Blue jumped right into the middle of the ditch, and when she came out she had left her holiday shoe behind her in the mud.



Lost her holiday shoe.

Little Betty Blue
Lost her holiday shoe.
What can little Betty do?

Why, give her another, said Mr. Blue, who was very fond

of his little daughter, *to match the other, and then she may walk in two.*

"It's all very fine for you to talk like that, Benjamin," said his wife crossly. "But where is the money coming from to buy Betty new shoes all the time?"

It was at this moment, when the dispute about Betty's shoes was going on, that Boy Blue came in and said that he had been dismissed.

Now there was an argument between Mr. and Mrs. Blue, because Mr. Blue wanted to give his son another thrashing and Mrs. Blue vowed that he oughtn't to be so hard on the poor boy. So, before the day was out, the whole household was more in the blues than ever.

Meanwhile, Peter Peep the shepherd had been sent for by Farmer Muffet to explain how the sheep had got into the meadow. He said that they had been put in the care of his daughter Bo; but when everybody went to investigate the matter, there were no sheep in the meadow and there was no sign of Bo Peep herself.

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep,
And cannot tell where to find them.

Some of the lookers-on felt sorry for the shepherd and tried to console him:

Leave them alone, and they'll come home,
And bring their tails behind them.

But this was no consolation either to Peter Peep or the farmer, because the shepherd had lost his little daughter and Farmer Muffet had lost his sheep.

The fact was that little Bo Peep had got very tired,

wandering about in search of her sheep, and she had lain down in a corner of a distant meadow.

Little Bo Peep fell fast asleep,
And dreamt she heard them bleating;
But when she awoke, she found it a joke,
For they were still a-fleeting.

"This is a nice thing," said Farmer Muffet.

This cruel practical joke was played by Jack Horner, with his tin trumpet. He had found Bo Peep asleep under a hedge, and he had blown his trumpet to make her think that she could hear her sheep bleating.

Then she took up her little crook,
Determined for to find them;
She found them indeed, but it made her heart bleed,
For they'd left their tails behind them.

"This is a nice thing," said Farmer Muffet, when she brought back the sheep without their tails. "What good are my sheep without their tails?"

The farmer was already in such a bad temper that without listening to any more excuses he dismissed his shepherd from his service until his daughter could find the tails. What a time poor little Bo Peep had all those holidays, looking for them; and, alas, she never succeeded in finding them. In fact the tails were not found until early next Spring, when she was searching one of the fields surrounded by a hazel hedge.

It happened one day, as Bo Peep did stray,
Over a meadow hard by,
That there she espied their tails side by side,
All hung on a tree to dry.

The next thing that happened this Summer was another misfortune for the Piper family, because Peter, forgetting that he had learnt in the catechism to keep his hands from picking and stealing, picked a peck of pickling pepper that belonged to Mr. Wagg.

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickling pepper;
A peck of pickling pepper Peter Piper picked.

"Here's a nice state of affairs," said Mr. Wagg.

If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickling pepper,
Where's the peck of pickling pepper Peter Piper picked?

"The boy must have eaten the blessed lot," said Mr. Wagg, aiming a blow at his apprentice.

"I didn't," Peter yelled. "I spat it out. It was too hot."

While this was going on at the grocer's, two houses further down a domestic scene was taking place at Mr. Rowley the baker's, where his son Robert had lost a round roll.

Robert Rowley rolled a round roll round,
A round roll Robert Rowley rolled round;
Where rolled the round roll Robert Rowley rolled round?

"It rolled into Jack Horner's mouth," said Robert. And I daresay this was the true explanation of what happened to that round roll.

"I'll give you round roll," said Anthony Rowley to his son. Whereupon he picked up the longest roll in the shop and gave Robert a thorough beating with it.

Even up at the Rectory things were no better.

Naughty Willy Bell
Fell into the well,
Though Mama had told him not to move its cover;
But the stubborn little elf
Only chose to please himself,
Looking in, turned giddy, and fell over.

You never saw a boy in such a mess.

Luckily, John Sage Green the gardener was close at hand and came to his help.

But the gardener heard him shout,
And with assistance got him out;
You never saw a boy in such a mess;
In future he will find
Mama he'd better mind,
Nor again ever cause her such distress.

Everybody in Banbury Cross suffered on account of Willy Bell's disobedience, because his mother per-

suaded the Rector not to allow the villagers to use the Rectory well any more, so that they all had to climb up to the well on top of Pippen Hill when they wanted water.

Down at the blacksmith's forge more clothes were spoilt, for on a cold blowy day, about Bartlemy tide,

Little Polly Flinders sat among the cinders,
Warming her pretty little toes ;
Her mother came and caught her and whipped her little daughter
For spoiling her nice new clothes.

Up at the miller's, his daughter Elsie, who had been ordered to feed her father's pigs all through the holidays, had turned both lazy and disobedient.

Elsie Marley is grown so fine,
She won't get up to feed the swine,
But lies in bed till eight or nine,
And surely she does take her time.

Jack Trot and Jill Trot were always a clumsy pair, but they had never been so careless as they were this Summer. Poor old Dame Trot was quite worried by their slovenly ways.

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water ;
Jack fell down and cracked his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

The grocer's son Charley followed the bad example set him by his father's apprentice, Peter Piper.

Charley Wagg, Charley Wagg.
Ate the pudding and lost the bag.

At least he did not eat all the pudding, because he gave half of it to Georgie Porgie. I do not know what was inside that pudding, but I do know that

Georgie Porgie, pudding and pie,
Kiss'd the girls and made them cry.

I suppose that he did feel rather ashamed of his bad manners, for

When the girls came out to play
Georgie Porgie ran away.

All these incidents had been bad enough, but in due course something more serious happened.

Lucy Locket lost her pocket,
Kitty Fisher found it;

In due course something more serious happened.

The very next night he was out again.

And I am very sorry to add that, although there was a penny in the pocket when Lucy Locket lost it, Kitty Fisher declared that when she found it:

There was not a penny in it,
But a ribbon round it.

There was not one person in Banbury Cross who did not believe that Kitty Fisher had stolen Lucy Locket's penny. And it made everybody feel most uncomfortable, because the two little girls had been such friends.

As for Willie Winkie, ever since the fun they had that night at Mother Hubbard's,

Wee Willie Winkie runs through the town,
Upstairs and downstairs in his nightgown,
Tapping at the windows, crying through the lock,
'Are the babes in their beds, for it's now ten o'clock?'

Not unnaturally the mothers of Banbury Cross resented this behaviour on the part of Willie Winkie, for, as they said, it was nothing to do with him whether their babies were in bed by ten o'clock or not. Several complaints were

made about him to his father, the candlestick-maker. Mrs. Winkie spoke severely to her little son and told him he really must not upset people like that. But the very next night he was out again,

Glowering like the moon ;
Rattling in an iron jug
With an iron spoon ;
Rumbling, tumbling all about,
Crowing like a cock,
Screaming like I don't know what,
Waking sleeping folk.

When Tom Piper was sent away from Farmer Muffet's for stealing the pig, he persuaded his father to let him take up pipe-playing as a profession :

Tom, Tom, the Piper's son
Learnt to play when he was young,
But the only tune that he could play
Was 'Over the hills and far away' ;
Over the hills, and a great way off,
And the wind will blow my top-knot off.

Now Tom with his pipe made such a noise,
That he pleased both the girls and boys,
And they stopped to hear him play
'Over the hills and far away.'

And they did this instead of getting on with their own work as they ought.

Tom on his pipe did play with such skill,
That those who heard him could never keep still ;
Whenever they heard him they began to dance——
Even pigs on their hind legs would after him prance.

And of course this infuriated Farmer Muffet, who

She danced about till the eggs were all broke.

said if Tom went on playing with such skill he should soon not have a single pig left in the styes.

Then Tom turned his attention to the musical cow belonging to the family.

As Dolly was milking her cow one day,
Tom took out his pipe and began for to play;
So Doll and the cow danced 'the Cheshire round,'
Till the pail was broke, and the milk ran on the ground.

'The Cheshire round' is an old country dance, and when Tom's father rebuked him for playing such a tune, he vowed that he only played it to improve the Cheshire cheese.

He met old Dame Trot with a basket of eggs,
He used his pipe and she used her legs;
She danced about till the eggs were all broke,
She began for to fret, but he laughed at the joke.

But the most remarkable fall of all was Jack Horner's. Jack Horner was so jealous when he heard about the pudding that Charley Wagg and Georgie Porgie ate, and he had been so much spoilt by his mother's giving him puddings and pies whenever he asked for them, in season and out of season, that he used to keep on whining:

When Jack is a very good boy
He shall have cakes and custard,

until his persistence became a bit too much even for her patience.

At last one morning she was so violently irritated that she snapped at him :

But when he does nothing but cry,
He shall have nothing but mustard.

To the intense delight of all the children in Banbury Cross, Jack Horner was made to eat a whole pot of mustard. He howled and bellowed and groaned and moaned and blubbered so much about this that all the children cried :

Cowardy, cowardy, custard,
Eat your father's mustard.

And I need scarcely add that Red Riding Hood cried this after him louder than any of them.

" All right," Jack Horner muttered to himself. " You wait a bit. I'll have my revenge."

For several days after this he and the only supporter he had left, odious Johnny Green, used to skulk about together, evidently plotting some dastardly action.

CHAPTER XVI THE WOLF

CHAPTER XVI THE WOLF

IT is hardly necessary to say that Puck was tremendously pleased with the pranks of Tom Piper. There was nothing he liked better than jokes at the expense of disagreeable old women, and Dame Trot had been very disagreeable all her life.

One day, soon after the upsetting of Dame Trot, Mother Hubbard went to market to sell her eggs:

There was an old woman, as I've heard tell,
She went to market, her eggs for to sell;

He cut her petticoats up to the knees.

She went to market all on a market-day,
And she fell asleep on the King's highway.

It happened that Pedlar Stout had gone to market on the same day to peddle his needles, and Puck put it into his head when he saw Mother Hubbard asleep by the side of the road to play her a most unpleasant trick.

There came by a pedlar whose name was Stout;
He cut her petticoats all round about,
He cut her petticoats up to the knees,
Which made the old woman to shiver and freeze.

When this little old woman first did wake,
She began to shiver and she began to shake;
She began to wonder and she began to cry,
"Oh! deary, deary me, this is none of I!

But if it be I, as I hope it be,
I've a little dog at home, and he'll know me;
If it be I, he'll wag his little tail,
And if it be not I, he'll loudly bark and wail."

Home went the little woman all in the dark;
Up got the little dog and he began to bark;
He began to bark, so she began to cry,
"Oh! deary, deary me, this is none of I!"

However, poor Mother Hubbard recognised the furniture in her cottage, and presently she called "Buff! Buff! Buff!" several times, until at last, after sniffing at her very cautiously and growling under his breath, he grasped that it really was his mistress. Buff declared that she had given him a terrible fright by coming home in this way with her

petticoats up to her knees; but he said that he was ready to forgive her. The poor Dame was overjoyed when Buff spoke like this, and soon after thought of a way to show her gratitude.

Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard
To get her poor dog a bone;
But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so the poor dog had none.

Well, of course, as you know, there is nothing worse than a disappointment of this kind, whether it be for a dog or a child, and Buff felt most indignant at what he considered was just as unpleasant a trick to play on him as the Pedlar had played on the Dame. The next time that Mother Hubbard went to market, he thought that he should like to play a trick upon her himself, and as he was taking a solitary stroll in the wood he met a Wolf.

"Good morning," said the Wolf. "What is the news?"

"Good morning," said Buff respectfully. "I don't think that there is any news.

"How is your old woman?" the Wolf asked in a vulgar and domineering tone of voice.

"Well, to tell you the truth, I am still rather offended with her at the moment," said Buff. "She played what I think was a stupid and pointless practical joke on me last week, which frightened me rather more than I cared to admit. I must say I think it rather indelicate, don't you, for an old woman of her age to cut her petticoats up to her knees and come back in the dark and frighten me out of a very pleasant dream I was having about bones?"

"You ought to have bitten her leg," said the Wolf.

"Well, that was my first impulse," Buff admitted.

" In fact, I very nearly did bite her, for really she gave me a bad fright." He was going to add, " But, of course, a well-brought-up dog doesn't want to behave

" I must say I think it rather indelicate, don't you, for an old woman of her age to cut her petticoats up to her knees and come back in the dark and frighten me out of a very pleasant dream I was having about bones ? "

like a wolf," when he remembered to whom he was speaking and stopped himself in time.

" You ought to play a joke on her this week," said the Wolf.

" Honestly, she almost deserves it," Buff agreed.

" I've thought of a glorious joke," said the Wolf.

"Have you?"

"Yes, why don't you let me come indoors and lie down on the hearth-rug, and when the old girl comes back from market and calls 'Buff,' I'll jump up and howl at her. Don't you think that would be an excellent joke?"

"Yes, it would be a good joke," Buff agreed a little doubtfully. "But mind you, it must be nothing more than a joke."

"Oh, of course," said the Wolf. "Nothing at all serious naturally. Just two or three really loud howls."

No doubt by now you have all guessed that the Wolf was none other than old Mother Twitchett, who could not enter any house unless she was invited to come in by somebody who lived in it.

"Yes, it would give her a good lesson," Buff began. To tell the truth, he did not feel at all comfortable about letting this joke be played, and like many other people he was trying to persuade himself that it was all right. "I shouldn't so much have minded her coming back and frightening me," he went on, "if she hadn't sold me over the bone. But I do maintain that nobody has any right to say 'Buff! Buff! Buff! Come here, good dog, come and have a nice bone!' and then, when your mouth is watering with anticipation, to go and open a cupboard door and show that all the time there's no such thing as a bone in the house."

"A very shabby trick indeed," the Wolf agreed. "She deserves anything she gets after that."

"Well, not quite anything," said Buff, who was feeling more uncomfortable every minute. "And anyway, I think you had better let me be there when you play this trick."

"No need for that," said the Wolf. "That would spoil the effect. I shan't hurt her."

"No, I should be awfully sorry if she was hurt," said Buff.

"It will be all over in a minute," said the Wolf.

"What will be all over in a minute?" Buff asked nervously.

"Why, the joke," said the Wolf.

"Oh, the joke! I thought at first you meant something else."

"You didn't think I was going to eat her?" the Wolf asked, laughing coarsely and digging Buff in the ribs.

"Oh, no, I never thought that," said Buff.

"Ha-ha-ha!" the Wolf chuckled. "Now that really would be a joke."

"Ha-ha-ha!" Buff echoed half-heartedly. "That would, wouldn't it?"

He began to wish he had never met the Wolf, because he was afraid that, if now he said that he could not allow this joke to be played on Mother Hubbard, the Wolf might play some worse kind of joke on himself.

"Look here, I don't think we'd better play a joke on her, after all," he said, wagging his tail to try to conciliate his companion.

"What!" the Wolf snarled so fiercely that poor Buff jumped back a couple of paces and put his tail between his legs. He wished to goodness now that he had not let his tongue run away with him.

Of course, you all know how easy it is for a dog to let his tongue run away with him; in fact, he himself only has to run about a very little bit for his tongue to do that. You often see a dog lying down and panting, while his tongue runs away with him so fast

that you begin to wonder if he will ever catch up with his breath again.

To make matters worse, the Wolf suggested coming back with him immediately to Mother Hubbard's house. He made up his mind that the only thing to do was to run as fast as he could to market and warn the Dame of what the Wolf intended to do; but he had not run more than a few yards when the Wolf caught him up and seized him by the scruff of the neck.

"You'd run away, would you?" said the Wolf, shaking him. "You cowardly little cur!"

"I wasn't running away at all," Buff whined. "I only jumped back because I had trodden on a nettle. What gave you the impression I was trying to run away? How very odd!"

"You come along with me," said the Wolf savagely.

Buff was by now in despair, and he was so sorry for what he had done that, if he could have saved his mistress by letting the Wolf gobble him up, I believe that he would have done so. He knew that he had left the front door open, and unfortunately he did not realize that the Wolf could not come in without being invited, for it never occurred to him that this was wicked old Mother Twitchett, the witch and werewolf. He walked along behind the Wolf in a state of such utter dejection that he did not notice that his tail had picked up a dead thistle, which it was dragging along the ground behind him. Presently they came to the garden gate of Mother Hubbard's cottage, and the Wolf rolled a revengeful red eye at the big trap set to catch her in the gap of the hedge.

"Open the gate, please," said the Wolf.

And without a growl Buff opened it for the fierce creature.

"You have some fine lupins in your garden," said the Wolf. "They're my favourite flowers."

I advise you to ask your father, who is sure to know Latin, why the lupin is the Wolf's favourite flower.

"How does your front-door work?"

We have reached such a serious point in our story that there is no time to stop and explain anything.

"How does your front-door work?" the Wolf enquired, for the cunning old witch had to make sure of being invited in.

"Pull the bobbin and the latch will fly up," Buff replied.

With a triumphant snarl the Wolf stood on her hind legs, opened the door, and jumped inside. It was at this moment that Buff first noticed that the Wolf's tail was bandaged. In a flash he guessed that he had admitted Mother Twitchett herself into the Dame's house. But alas, it was too late.

"Come back," growled the Wolf. "Look here, young Buff, I think I'll chain you up in your kennel out of the way."

Ordinarily Buff would have barked indignantly if anybody had called his bedroom a kennel, but he was now so utterly subdued that he allowed himself to be led away and chained to his own bed, and worst of all to be muzzled as well! The Wolf would gladly have eaten him, but if a werewolf eats anything except a human being, it cannot change itself back into human shape again.

Meanwhile, old Mother Hubbard, quite unconscious of the dreadful visitor who was waiting to eat her up in her own kitchen, was stumping home from market. She had sold all her eggs and was bringing back a most succulent marrow-bone to make up to Buff for his disappointment when the cupboard was bare a fortnight ago. She called cheerfully to her dog when she passed through the garden gate. Poor Buff heard her, but being muzzled he could only utter such tiny little barks of warning that the Dame, who was rather deaf, did not hear them.

She walked along the garden path.
She reached the door.
She pulled the bobbin.
The latch flew up.
She pushed open the door.
She stept inside.
Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Gobble-gobble-gobble-gobble-gobble-gobble!
Myum-myum-myum!
Yaw—w—ww-n!

"Dear me," said the Wolf sleepily. "I bolted the old woman rather too quickly. I really think I shall have to lie down and take a nap. Keep quiet in there, will you?" she growled angrily at Buff, who was whining for grief at Mother Hubbard's untimely fate. "Keep quiet, will you? Unless you want me to turn you into dessert!"

Buff lay trembling in silence, and the Wolf walked rather unsteadily into Mother Hubbard's bedroom, where she got into bed and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVII A TERRIBLE ADVENTURE

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WHILE this dreadful event was taking place at Mother Hubbard's, Mrs. Riding Hood was saying to her little daughter:

"I think, dear child, that it is now high time you paid another visit to Grandmama's. You have not been to see her once since you took all the children with you that night. I have collected a few dainties for her in this basket, and on top I have put a pair of mittens of which I'm sure she will be glad."

Red Riding Hood was only too pleased to go and visit her grandmother on this golden morning in early September, particularly because it was now blackberry time, and the finest blackberries of all grew in Tanglewood Coppice. Before she set out she looked round everywhere for Diddle Dumpty, but she could not find her. She called her cat loudly, and shook the branches of the plum-tree in case she had gone to sleep among them on this sweet and drowsy morning. But it was no use. Diddle Dumpty was simply nowhere to be found, and Mrs. Riding Hood urged her daughter to make haste so that she could be home before it was dark.

"If I find Diddle Dumpty, I'll tell her to go and meet you," Mrs. Riding Hood promised. And with this Red Riding Hood had to be content.

She did not find the crooked mile nearly so long or so crooked this morning, perhaps because the blackberries that grew in the hedges on either side, although they were not crooked themselves, were so unripe that when she ate them they made her mouth quite crooked. So Red Riding Hood did not waste any time over them. She would have been glad to have a short chat with Mother Dumpty; but when she passed the house under the hill she saw a notice on the

" I smell a delicious morsel coming this way."

door: *Mother Dumpty is not at home to-day.* So Red Riding Hood did not waste any time here.

Meanwhile the Wolf had woken up, and soon after Red Riding Hood entered Tanglewood Coppice she was sitting up in Mother Hubbard's bed and sniffing the air.

" I smell a delicious morsel coming this way," she growled greedily to herself. " A tender little girl, I should say. A very tender little girl. I wonder if I could manage to stagger down the glade so that she crosses my path. Old Mother Hubbard wasn't very tasty. I ate her more to pay the old woman out for setting that trap than because I enjoyed eating her."

The Wolf made an effort to get off the bed and go out to lie in wait for the victim. But she had eaten too much, and sank back on the pillow again with a sigh.

" Well, well, I suppose I must be content with the Dame. But I must say that I should have enjoyed a really tender little girl."

Buff could hear what she was saying, and he would have given all the bones in the world to be able to break loose from the chain and rush to warn Red Riding Hood of her danger, for he was sure that it must be she.

" Coming nearer and nearer," said the Wolf, licking her lips and rolling that wicked and solitary eye. " It is most tantalizing."

At this moment a Red Admiral butterfly came fluttering through the open window into Buff's room.

"Admiral, Admiral," said Buff. "Forgive me for not saluting you as I should, but my paws are not at liberty. Admiral, do be so kind as to fly down the glade and warn a little girl in a red cloak who is coming this way that a wicked wolf is waiting inside to gobble her up. Do your best to make her go back home."

The Red Admiral flew away at once and soon found Red Riding Hood. He fluttered to right and left of her and tried to tempt her to chase him. But Red Riding Hood did not want to chase butterflies, for the basket of dainties that she was carrying was beginning to weigh heavy on this hot September day.

"Fly away, Red Admiral," she said. "I shan't run after you."

And on she went toward her grandmother's cottage where the Wolf was waiting.

The Red Admiral flew back and told Buff that he could not make Red Riding Hood understand the danger she was in.

Buff was in despair.

Then a wasp flew into his room and buzzed irritably round and round.

"O Wasp," said Buff, "if I have ever snapped at you when you flew past me on the sunny garden path, forgive me and come to my aid now. O Wasp, there is a little girl who must not enter here to-day. O Wasp, fly down the glade and stop her, even if you have to sting her into stopping."

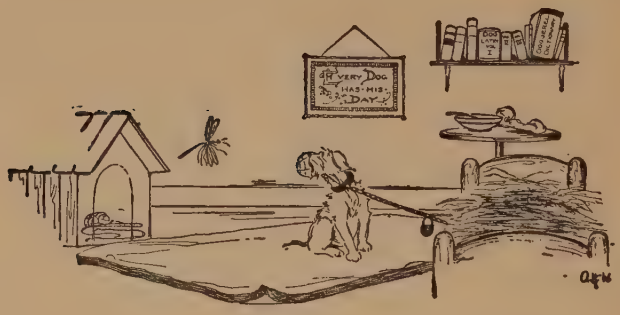
The Wasp, who had a kind heart for all his fierce appearance, flew off and buzzed alarmingly in front of Red Riding Hood.

"Go away, you silly old Wasp," she said. "I'm not a bit afraid of you!"

"Buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz-buzz," said the Wasp.

But Red Riding Hood paid no attention and went on her way to where the Wolf was waiting.

"Buzz!" the Wasp shouted in exasperation at her stupidity; and when Red Riding Hood still would



"Hullo, Buff," said Daddy Longlegs.
"You're looking very unhappy."

not stop, he flew at the arm on which she was carrying the basket and stung her wrist.

"Ouch!" Red Riding Hood squeaked.

"Buzz-buzz-buzz," said the Wasp.

Red Riding Hood had dropped her basket and was sucking the poison from the sting. As for the Wasp, who was a practical fellow and knew how to combine pleasure with business, he settled down to enjoy some of the delicacies that were spilt on the mossy ground.

But presently the pain of the sting began to get less. Red Riding Hood flicked away the Wasp, gathered together the delicacies for her grandmother, picked up the basket, and went on her way to where the Wolf was waiting.

The Wasp flew back and told Buff that he had done what he could, but that he had not been able to turn Red Riding Hood back.

And there she was walking along, getting nearer with every step to the cruel jaws of the Wolf.

A Daddy Longlegs now flew into the room in which Buff was a prisoner. But where a Red Admiral and a Wasp had failed, how was a Daddy Longlegs to succeed?

"Hullo, Buff," said Daddy Longlegs. "You're looking very unhappy. Why aren't you out and about on this lovely morning? I've been dancing over the stubble since dawn."

"I'm chained to the bed," said Buff.

"That's unlike the Dame," said Daddy Longlegs.

"It wasn't the Dame," Buff said. "The Dame has been eaten by the Wolf, and now the Dame's granddaughter is walking along the glade and getting nearer every minute, and I bow-wow-know she'll be gobbled up. Oh, Daddy, what can be done?"

"Why don't you call in fairy help?" said Daddy Longlegs.

"I would if I knew bow-wow-how," Buff replied.

"Keep quiet in there," the Wolf growled from the other room. "How can I get my sleep if you keep yapping away to yourself like that?"

"Haven't you got a Hobgoblin in this house? Wouldn't he do anything to help?" Daddy Longlegs whispered in a hoarse voice.

"Witches are more powerful than Hobgoblins," Buff reminded him.

"I know. But the Hobgoblin would warn the Fairies."

"But bow-wow-how can we find the Hobgoblin? He sleeps all day somewhere right at the back of the kitchen range."

"I'll fetch a Grasshopper," said Daddy Longlegs.

"What's the good of a Grasshopper?"

"The Grasshopper will wake the Cricket, and the Cricket will wake the Hobgoblin."

Daddy Longlegs danced out of the window and presently came back with a grasshopper.

"Oh, Grasshopper," said Buff. "Please wake the Cricket and ask the Cricket to tell the Hobgoblin that Red Riding Hood is in danger of being devoured by the Wolf and beg him to apply for fairy help."

The Grasshopper hopped away to do what he was asked; but by this time Red Riding Hood was so very much nearer to her grandmother's house that it looked as if the fairy help would be too late.

"Who's that opening the garden-gate?" The Wolf sat up in bed and growled.

Buff nearly fainted.

The Wolf looked through the lattice-window, and to her joy she saw Red Riding Hood tripping along up the path to the very door.

"I shall get my second meal after all, and a more toothsome morsel I've seldom seen," the Wolf chuckled to herself.

Meanwhile the Hobgoblin had sprung up the chimney on a coil of smoke and was being wafted into Fairyland.

But was he not too late? Red Riding Hood was already tapping on the fatal door.

"Pull the bobbin, my little dear," said the Wolf, giving a perfect imitation of Mother Hubbard's voice. "Pull the bobbin and the latch will fly up."

Red Riding Hood opened the door and walked in.

This time Buff really did faint right away.

When the Wolf had seen Red Riding Hood tripping up the garden-path she had hastily put on the Dame's nightgown and nightcap, for the old lady's weight inside would not allow her to jump up and spring at Red Riding Hood the moment she came into the bedroom.

"Oh, Grannie," Red Riding Hood exclaimed. "Are you ill? I've brought you some cakes and pastries from mother."

"Come nearer, my little dear," said the Wolf. "I'm not at all well, I'm sorry to say. So please come nearer to the bed, so that I can see your pretty face."

"But, Grannie," Red Riding Hood said, "how funny your face does look."

"That's because I'm so ill, my little dear. Illness does change a poor body so."

As luck would have it, the first Fairy that the Hobgoblin met was King Oberon himself, who was out hunting hairs all by himself. The Hobgoblin prostrated himself humbly.

"Rise," said the Fairy King.

"Your Immortal Majesty and Elfin Highness," said the Hobgoblin, "I have presumed to enter Your Majesty's glorious realm of Faerie to inform Your Immortal Majesty that little Red Riding Hood is at this very moment in danger of being devoured by old Mother Twitchett, the notorious witch and werewolf of Tanglewood Coppice."

"Red Riding Hood in danger?" Oberon cried, and

putting his horn to his lips he sounded a blast that shook all Fairyland.

In a moment he was surrounded by troops of Fairy Knights.

"To the rescue of Red Riding Hood!"

"Follow me," he commanded. "To the rescue of Red Riding Hood!"

"To the rescue of Red Riding Hood," his Fairy Knights echoed, and the sound of their answer was

like the sighing of the wind in a large forest. If you had been in the neighbourhood, you might have seen Oberon and all his Elfin Chivalry that morning, but you would have thought that they were the dewy gossamer in the meadows.

"Poor Grannie!" Red Riding Hood sighed. "I am so sorry for you."

"Come nearer, my dear, come nearer! I can hardly see you with my one eye."

"Why, Grannie, you've lost an eye!"

"Yes, I dropped it somewhere on the way back from market last week," said the Wolf. "I advertised for it in the Agony Column, but I've not had any replies. I'm afraid it must have rolled down a rabbit-hole. Pray, come a little nearer still."

"Oh, Grannie, what big ears you've got!"

"The better to hear you with, my dear," said the Wolf.

"And oh, Grannie, what enormous teeth you've got!"

"The better to eat you with," the Wolf roared, making a spring toward Red Riding Hood, who screamed so loudly that Buff was roused from his fainting fit and fainted away all over again. The claws of the Wolf were actually tearing at Red Riding Hood's pinafore when Huntsman Bunting, who had been carried from the other end of Tanglewood Coppice by the Fairies, rushed into the cottage and cut the monster in half with his hunting-knife.

Whereupon, alive all the time, out stepped the Dame herself. The Wolf had swallowed her so fast that beyond a few bruises she was none the worse for her adventure. It was the work of a moment to release Buff. His joy at seeing the Dame safe and sound when he had never expected to see her again

was intense. And I can assure you that it was a very long time indeed before Master Buff played another practical joke.

Puck was severely scolded when King Oberon returned to Fairyland, firstly for encouraging Pedlar Stout to cut Mother Hubbard's petticoats up to her knees, which was the beginning of the trouble with Buff, and secondly for not keeping a better eye on Red Riding Hood herself.

"It might have been a very serious matter indeed," said the Fairy King.

And Puck was really so much ashamed of himself that he did not attempt to argue with his Sovereign.

CHAPTER XVIII DOWN THE WELL

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HUNTSMAN BUNTING most kindly offered to escort Red Riding Hood as far as the outskirts of Banbury Cross after her alarming adventure with the Wolf. Mrs. Riding Hood nearly collapsed when her daughter gave her an account of what had happened. She vowed that Red Riding Hood should not go near Tanglewood Coppice until all the witches in the neighbourhood had been disposed of.

"But there's only Hink Minx left," said Red Riding Hood. "Because Mother Dumpty is a white witch."

"She may not be as white as she's painted," Mrs. Riding Hood argued, with a shake of the head. "Anyway, Hink Minx is still about, and that's quite enough to make me anxious."

At this moment who should come bouncing along the road but little Jumping Joan; as usual, all by herself. When she reached the gate of Woodbine Cottage, Joan stopped jumping and asked if she might come in.

"Oh, Red Riding Hood," she said. "I'm more alone than ever. Hink Minx was terribly angry when the moon escaped from her that night. She said it was all on account of her bad eyesight. She was furious with Mr. Alexander, and she said that as soon as she found a suitable bush she shouldn't wait another minute for his advice, but jump right into it. And oh, Red Riding Hood, she's done it!"

"These witches are really a plague and a pest," Mrs. Riding Hood declared. "What has Hink Minx done now?"

"Oh, Mrs. Riding Hood," Joan sobbed, "she jumped into an enormous holly bush and scratched out both her eyes, but she simply couldn't scratch either of them in again. She scratched in two holly berries once, but they were no good to see with.

'Now you've done it, and no mistake,' Mr. Alexander said. And she went on jumping in and out of the holly, in and out, until she scratched herself right in half."

"But what are you crying for?" Mrs. Riding Hood asked. "I'm sure I've never heard better news in my life. Two wicked old witches have both come to a bad end. I'm delighted to hear it."

"But I've been left behind," Joan wailed. "As soon as Hink Minx scratched herself in half Mr. Alexander packed up. He's gone back to Thessaly with his father and mother and left me here all alone."

"Oh, Mother dear," Red Riding Hood begged, "can't Joan live with me and be my little sister?"

"Why, yes, poor little lonely girl," Mrs. Riding Hood said. "I'm sure that would be very nice for both of you."

When Joan heard this, she jumped for joy higher than she had ever jumped before. In fact, she jumped right over Woodbine Cottage and back. As for Red Riding Hood, she called loudly to Diddle Dumpty, so that she might tell her the good news.

But loudly though Red Riding Hood called, there was no reply from the cat.

"And now I come to think of it," Mrs. Riding Hood said, "I haven't seen Diddle Dumpty since early this morning."

"Oh, Mother, you don't think that she ran after me when I started, and couldn't find me and was eaten by the Wolf?"

"No, I scarcely think so. Because here are her thick boots. And if she had gone to look for you, dear, she would certainly have put on her thick boots."

Red Riding Hood was nearly distracted. Never since she had found Diddle Dumpty on the banks

of the Serpentine had the cat been away from her side for more than an hour or two.

"Oh, where can she be?" Red Riding Hood cried, wringing her hands.

At this moment the church bell tolled solemnly:

Ding—dong—bell!
Ding—dong—bell!

"Red Riding Hood!" she cried, "Pussy's in the well."

"It sounds like a funeral," Mrs. Riding Hood said.

"Shall I jump up to the churchyard and see who is dead?" Joan asked.

But before she had started Margery Daw came running down the road with a pale face and red eyes.

"Red Riding Hood! Red Riding Hood!" she cried. "*Pussy's in the well.*"

"*Who put her in?*" Red Riding Hood shrieked.

"*Little Johnny Green,*" said Margery.

"*Who'll get her out?*" Red Riding Hood sobbed.

"*Little Sammy Stout?*" said Margery. "Don't cry, dear Red Riding Hood. Sammy says he's sure that he can get her out."

Ding—dong—bell!
Pussy's in the well.
Ding—dong—bell!

"Oh, Mother, I must go," said Red Riding Hood. "What shall I do if my poor Diddle is drowned in a well when I saved her from drowning herself in the Serpentine?"

"Run along at once, dear," her mother advised.

"But, pray, pray, be careful not to fall down the well yourself."

"Which well did that little brute put her in?" Red Riding Hood asked Margery Daw when they were hurrying along, with Joan jumping ahead of them all the way.

"The well on Pippen Hill," said Margery. "The deepest and best well anywhere."

The tears were running faster down Red Riding Hood's cheeks than she herself was running down the road.

"It was Jack Horner who made him do it," Margery said. "He did it to revenge himself on you."

"The podgy little beast—beast—beast!" Red Riding Hood exclaimed, her hair aflame with rage.

By this time the sound of the bell being tolled by Sexton Daw had brought all the children of Banbury Cross helter-skelter to see what was the matter; and when they heard the news, how they all hurried up Pippen Hill!

This is how they ran:

Jumping Joan
Red Riding Hood
Margery Daw
Tom Piper
Dolly Piper
Willie Winkie
Jack Trot
Jill Trot
Betty Blue
Peter Piper
Charley Wagg
Bo Peep

Georgie Porgie
Lucy Locket
Kitty Fisher
Tommy Tittlemouse
Jane Muffet
Elsie Marley
Bernard Bunting
Tom Tucker
Robert Rowley
Willy Bell
Polly Flinders

Boy Blue

At the top of Pippen Hill they found Sammy Stout gazing anxiously down into the depths of the well; but Jack Horner and Johnny Green had hurried away to hide themselves after their shameful action, and were nowhere to be seen.

"Hang on to the bucket, some of you," said Sammy. "I'm going down."

With what admiring glances the girls looked at the young hero, and how all the other boys each wished that he had been the one to offer to go down the well like this!

Tom Piper and Jack Trot sprang forward to take the two handles, and Sammy Stout was lowered down in the bucket. All the children leant over the edge in breathless silence, while down in the village the church bells went on solemnly tolling:

Ding—dong—bell!
Pussy's in the well.

A big sycamore tree overhung the well, and far down below the children could see such a beautiful

land of black and silver that they began to envy Sammy Stout his voyage of discovery.

"I wish I'd gone down," said Willie Winkie.

"Pooh! It's nothing to go down a well," Willy Bell boasted. "You only get wet."

"The Rectory well is hardly a well at all," Jack Trot scoffed. "It's more like a tank and not a bit deep."

"It is a well. It is! It is!" Willy Bell said angrily.

"And when you did fall in," Tom went on, "you had to be fished out by Johnny Green's father. I wouldn't say too much about wells if I were you."

By this time the bucket, with Sammy Stout inside, had reached the water, and the beautiful black and silver world down into which the children had been staring was all blurred.

"Here she is!" a tiny voice called up from below.

"Is she safe?" Red Riding Hood called back.

"Purrfectly safe," a tiny purr came back in answer.

"Diddle, my darling, is that you?" her little mistress cried.

"Yes, its me-ow," a tiny mew came back.

At this all the children on the top of Pippen Hill gave three cheers, which were heard for miles and miles around.

"I say," Sammy Stout called up, "You ought all to come down. It's simply topping down here."

"How can it be topping at the bottom of anything?" Jill Trot shouted back, for she was an argumentative girl.

"I wonder if my sheep are down there?" said Bo Peep.

Several of the children thought that they might be.

"Perhaps the penny I had inside my pocket is

down there," Lucy Locket said, with a spiteful glance at Kitty Fisher.

"Aren't you coming down?" Sammy Stout called up once more. "It's only wet for a little bit. It's quite dry under the water, and the world down here is quite different from our world."

The children all looked at one another. It certainly would be a great adventure to go down a well and explore the country at the bottom.

"I'll go, if anybody else will come," Tom Piper volunteered.

"I'm not coming," said Willie Bell. "I'm going home to my mother. Going down wells is nothing."

And with this he turned round and ran off home as fast as he could.

"I'll come," Willie Winkie volunteered.

"So will I," said Red Riding Hood.

One after another all the children in turn said they would come.

"It'll take too long to lower everybody in the bucket," said Jack Trot. "I vote we all slide down the rope."

"I'll go first," Peter Piper shouted.

"Then me," Red Riding Hood cried.

And one after another, laughing and chattering, all the twenty-four children started to slide down the rope.

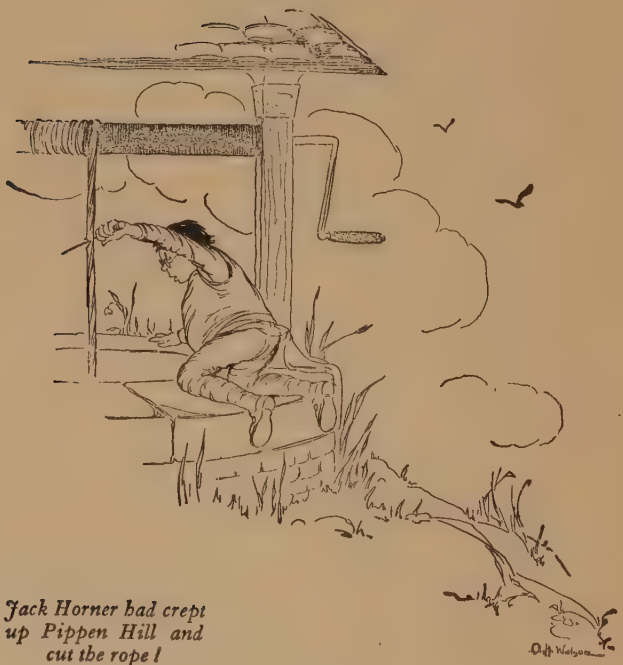
It seemed to take ages to reach the bottom, and the deeper they got the cooler it became.

"I wonder if we shall get any sliding when we arrive," Tom Tucker said, and then he began to sing:

Three children sliding on the ice,
Upon a summer's day;
It so fell out, they all fell in,
The rest they ran away.

Now, had these children been at home,
Or sliding on dry ground,
Ten thousand pounds to one penny
They had not all been drowned.

You parents that have children dear,
And eke you that have none,
If you would keep them safe abroad,
Pray keep them safe at home.



Jack Horner had crept up Pippen Hill and cut the rope!

It certainly was growing colder and colder, and, remembering the silver landscape they had seen from above, the children began to think that perhaps Tom Tucker was right.

"But shall we be drowned?" Polly Flinders whimpered.

"Don't be a baby, Polly," said Elsie Marley grandly.

"I wonder if I shall catch many fishes," Tommy Tittlemouse said. "There must be a lot of other men's ditches down here."

"Perhaps I shall find my holiday shoe," said Betty Blue hopefully.

Suddenly there were twenty-four screams and twenty-four splashes.

Jack Horner had crept up Pippen Hill and cut the rope!

When the children had regained their senses, they were sitting in a silver meadow entirely surrounded by high walls that touched the silver sky. At first, so cold was it they thought it must be snow that made the grass so white. But it wasn't. It really was white grass.

"I say, you did come down with a bump at the end," Sammy Stout chuckled. "It's a jolly good job it's a well and not an ill."

The rope and the bucket were lying in the middle of the field, but the bucket was the most extraordinary shape imaginable. Indeed, it no longer looked as if it was a bucket, and if it resembled anything it resembled a knight in armour. The rope, which had certainly been quite an ordinary rope, had now changed into a large snake that reared its ugly head and made all the children huddle together in terror. Luckily it did not attack them, but wriggled away

through a hole in the towering walls of this strange enclosure.

Red Riding Hood had scarcely paid any attention to this new world, because she had been so busy hugging Diddle Dumpty, who was purring very loudly, but not quite in the same way as she used to purr on earth. Here it was more like a gurgle than a purr. Perhaps purgling would be the best word for the noise she was making.

"Well, here we are," said Charley Wagg. "But how are we going to get back to Banbury Cross?"

The children looked at one another in dismay. They could none of them think of an answer to this rather alarming question. Suddenly the silver sky above them began to throw circles all over its surface, the kind of circles that raindrops make in ponds.

"I know," cried Dolly Piper. "It's raining on earth."

The children looked round for a tree under which they might shelter; but the trees down here were no good for shelter, because the branches were at the bottom, and only a bare trunk grew up until it disappeared in the sky.

"Why, it isn't the sky at all," said Red Riding Hood. "We're sitting on the sky ourselves."

And all the children ran about looking for comfortable little clouds in which they could loll back and dream.

"But if it's the sky, why isn't it blue?" asked Boy Blue.

"Pooh!" said Georgie Porgie. "Just because you live in a blue house you think everything's got to be blue everywhere."

Another extraordinary thing happened when the children moved about in this strange black and silver

world. As long as they sat still they looked very much as they looked on earth, but if they moved the slightest bit they looked as funny as people in spoons or teapots. Sometimes they were very long and thin. Sometimes they were very short and fat. Sometimes they were all wriggly round the edges. Sometimes they had huge heads and tiny bodies. Sometimes they had two noses. Sometimes they had four ears. It was most surprising.

"I wonder what we shall get to eat down here?" Peter Piper muttered gloomily.

But nobody paid any attention to him, because at this moment there was a tremendous splash above their heads. The sky was cracked all over like an egg-shell; and then down floated Buttercup, the Piper cow.

"Moo-moo!" Buttercup exclaimed. "I might have hurt moo-self badly."

"But why did you come down here, Buttercup?" Dolly Piper asked. "Were you trying to jump over the sun?"

"Moo-no," said Buttercup. "Sexton Daw threw-moo me down."

Then Dolly Piper explained:

I had a little cow: to save her,
I turned her into the meadow to graze her;

Buttercup went on:

There came a heavy storm of rain,
And drove the little cow home again.
The church doors they stood open,
And there the little cow was cropen;
The bell ropes they were made of hay,
And the little cow ate them all away;
The sexton came to toll the bell,
And pushed the little cow into the well!

"You won't get much to eat here, my poor Buttercup," said Dolly. And turning to the other children she went on:

"I suppose Willy Bell put Mr. Daw up to this, he and Jack Horner and Johnny Green. Wait till I get back to earth!"

I should almost have been sorry for Jack Horner if the children had caught him at this moment. But for

One by one the children crept into the hole after her.

the time Jack Horner was safe enough, because the children had not yet discovered the way to return to earth.

They walked all over the meadow, but there seemed no way of getting out of it; the walls on every side were too high even for Joan to jump over them. At last Willie Winkie called to them that he had found a small hole, where a stone had fallen out of the wall, into which he could creep.

"That must be the hole through which the snake crawled," Jane Muffet began to whimper.

"It can't be helped," said Red Riding Hood. "We must do something to escape. I'm going first. Come on, Diddle Dumpty!"

And one by one the children crept into the hole after her.

They were all crawling along in the darkness, trying not to feel very frightened, when suddenly they heard a tremendous bellowing behind them.

It was Buttercup.

"Moo-oh! Moo-oh! I can't moo-ve," she was groaning. "My horns have stuck in the moo-roof."

And poor Buttercup had to back out the way she came in to the white meadow with nothing to console her but Dolly's promise to rescue her if ever she herself got back to earth again.

As the children crept deeper and deeper into the tunnel, they could hear Buttercup's piteous moos getting fainter and fainter, until at last they could not be heard at all.

The darkness in the tunnel grew thicker and thicker, until at last it was so thick that Peter Piper broke a piece off and tasted it to see if it was good to eat. But it wasn't, and he was nearly choked. Jane Muffet and Polly Flinders began to cry, and most of

their companions felt rather like giving in, especially when Jack Trot said in a hollow voice that he hoped nobody would tread on the snake. Little Jumping Joan had a most uncomfortable journey, because the tunnel was so small that every time she jumped she bumped the back of her head on the roof. In fact, if Diddle Dumpty, who, of course, could see in the dark, had not gone first to lead the way, I believe that all the children would have turned back like Buttercup. At last, after scrambling for hours through the darkness, Tom Piper shouted that he could see a light ahead of him. All the children cheered up, and made sure that they would soon be on earth again.

But they were mistaken.

CHAPTER XIX CAPTURED BY GOBLINS

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ALL the children had been cheered at the thought of soon reaching daylight again; but alas, when they had crawled a little farther along the tunnel they could perceive that it was a flickering kind of light, much more like firelight than the blessed light of day.

"It must be the centre of the earth," Jill Trot announced in an awestruck voice. She had had several minutes' instruction in geology from Mistress Contrary, and none of the other children were prepared to contradict her.

The atmosphere undoubtedly was growing rapidly warmer, so much warmer indeed that the children in front drew back in affright with parched tongues and crackling eyebrows.

"Pouff!" Red Riding Hood gasped. "It's absolutely baking!"

A short consultation took place among the leaders, and it was decided that Polly Flinders and Robert Rowley and Diddle Dumpty should now lead the way, because they were all better able than the others to stand extreme heat.

Luckily, however, it did not get much hotter; and at last the children emerged from their tunnel into a mighty cavern of black rock, every crevice and cranny of which was lit up by flickering blue flames, while an enormous cauldron bubbled and seethed over a furnace that was roaring up from a crater in the middle of the ground.

"It looks as if we should get something to eat here, anyway," said Charley Wagg, who was trying to keep up his spirits by being funny.

And then suddenly all the children shrieked in chorus, for they found themselves surrounded by thousands and thousands and thousands of jet-black

shining goblins, who had emerged from every hole and corner, and who had flown down from the deepest recesses of the roof like bats, and some of whom had

Just sat staring at the children with their huge eyes.

actually come dancing out of the flaming crater. The most frightening thing was that all these thousands and thousands and thousands of goblins made

no more noise than a lot of shadows. They never spoke, nor even whispered, but they just sat staring at the children with their huge eyes like luminous pumpkins that slowly changed from red through various shades of green to purple and then flashed to orange and back to purple again like a lot of animated railway signals.

Diddle Dumpty defiantly changed her eyes from red to green and back again, but what were two cat's-eyes against such a multitude of goblin eyes? However, she bravely did her best to stare them out, and actually succeeded with one or two goblins, for their eyes went out like lamps.

While the children are clinging to one another and shrinking from these devouring eyes, which, by the way, all had double rows of teeth, you may care to hear what was happening at home in Banbury Cross all this time.

At first most of the fathers and mothers would not believe that their children had gone down the deep well on Pippen Hill, but when they did not come home to tea, and search parties searching everywhere could find no trace of them, and when Mrs. Riding Hood had told everybody about her daughter and Joan and Margery Daw going to look for Diddle Dumpty, the parents began to suppose that their children really had gone down the well to rescue the cat. A meeting of the village elders was hastily summoned under the presidency of Doctor Foster, who, having no children of his own, was considered the best person to take the chair, so that no favour would be shown to any particular parent. There was a long discussion about the steps that ought to be taken to rescue the children, and finally it was proposed that lots should be drawn to find out which three fathers should go down and

The whole village, headed by the village drummer, marched up Pippen Hill.

explore the bottom of the well. The lot fell upon Mr. Blue, Mr. Rowley, and Mr. Winkie. Doctor Foster declared the meeting closed, and the whole village, headed by the village drummer, marched up Pippen Hill. A large tub and a new rope had been procured, and, to the accompaniment of the drum, the three fathers were solemnly let down the well.

Rub—a—dub—dub!
Three men in a tub!
The butcher, the baker,
The candlestick-maker!

When the three fathers reached the bottom of the well, they found Buttercup trying to graze on the white grass, though she was not finding it at all nutritious after the delicious bell-ropes of hay, by eating which she had so much annoyed Sexton Daw.

"Where are the children?" the three fathers asked.

Buttercup shook her head mournfully and pointed with her horns to the hole on the huge walls. But, alas, when Mr. Winkie put a lighted candle inside it was seen that a great mass of earth had fallen and entirely blocked up the passage. No doubt, Buttercup had been the cause of this when she backed her way out.

"We can't do anything down here," said Mr. Blue in his most dismal voice.

"I suppose we'd better send the cow back to earth," Mr. Rowley suggested.

The others agreed, and Buttercup was told to get into the tub and be hauled up. It was tactless of the fathers to send the cow first like this, because of course all the anxious parents above thought that they were hauling up a tubful of their own children, so that when only a cow appeared they were all extremely angry. In fact, one or two of them wanted to throw her down again, and no doubt they would have done so if the Piper had not protested against his property's being treated in such a fashion. The tub was let down once more, and this time it brought back Mr. Blue Mr. Rowley, and Mr. Winkie, but no children.

The other parents were absolutely furious.

Rub—a—dub—dub!
Three men in a tub!
And who do you think they be?
The butcher! The baker!
The candlestick-maker!
"Turn 'em out, knaves all three"

shouted the enraged villagers.

The three of them explained.

However, the three of them explained what had happened, and at last they were able to persuade the other parents that they had done all that was possible down below.

It was a sad procession that wound its way back down Pippen Hill behind a muffled drum, and Banbury Cross was the saddest village in the world that day, for there was no sound of children's voices, good or bad. Not since the children of Hamelin followed the Pied Piper into the cavern had such a deep gloom fallen upon any place. It was true that Jack Horner, Johnny Green, and Willy Bell were still in Banbury Cross; but they had never been famous for their liveliness, and now that they were the only children left they were so much spoilt and so much overfed that they were scarcely like children any more. Johnny Green grew so fat that he looked more like a dumpling than a boy, and so lazy did his fatness make him that he couldn't bother to undress himself, so that his mother used to sing:

Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John
Went to bed with his trousers on;
One shoe off, the other shoe on;
Diddle, diddle, dumpling, my son John.

And here we must leave the top of this green earth and descend once more into the black depths far below, where the children are still trembling and the goblins are still staring at them in horrible silence.

At last the eerie silence was broken by a distant rumble that came nearer and nearer, like the rumble of a train in a tunnel. All the goblin eyes turned with one accord to a remote part of the mighty cavern. The flames burned more fiercely. The ground began to quake beneath the children's feet. Suddenly all

the goblins prostrated themselves, and the tips of their tails, which were sticking up behind them, burst into crimson flames to welcome His Immortal Solemnity and Goblin Lowness King Underon.

And a very alarming person he was.

And a very alarming person he was.

The King of the Goblins was as large as a gorilla, with horns like a stag and seven forked tails. His teeth shone like diamonds and his lips gleamed like rubies. His nose was all colours, like a black opal, and his ears were as big as an elephant's. As for his eyes,

they were as large as lighted aquariums, and so transparent that you could see all his thoughts swimming about at the back of his head like black fish.

With one accord the children fell upon their knees and begged for mercy, while Diddle Dumpty, with marvellous presence of mind, struck up *God Save the King* on her fiddle.

His Solemnity appeared softened by the musical compliment, and the black thought swimming in his head turned to a beautiful pale blue.

"I shall not have them cooked immediately," he proclaimed.

Whereupon the thousands and thousands of goblins all rose up and bowed their silent acknowledgment of the King's command.

"Feed them on the usual roots," said His Solemnity, "and set them to work in the mines. The cat will stay here and entertain me."

By the way, everything and everybody was so black down here that Diddle Dumpty, who had been so much admired on earth for her tabbiness, now looked as black as a goblin. Red Riding Hood embraced her passionately before she was led away to work in the mines, while Diddle Dumpty began to play to the King of the Goblins the lowest solos she had ever played. In fact, even the lowest notes on her fiddle were far too high for His Solemnity, and a quadruple-bass was produced in which the highest note was forty-eight octaves below the lowest note on a double-bassoon. Poor Diddle Dumpty, she would have found it less hard work in the mines than having to stay here and play this colossal fiddle.

The children were well fed on turnips, carrots, parsnips, and potatoes; but they had to work very

hard to get the amount of gold that their captors expected at the end of every night, for, of course, days down here did not exist. They lost all count of time and became nearly as black as the goblins themselves. Their life was so uninteresting that I think we had better leave them at work and return to the top of the earth to find out what steps are being taken to rescue them.

It was getting near Christmas, and Banbury Cross looked dreadfully sad. The village had been depressing enough before when it was merely cross. But now, when there was not a single window in a single cottage that was not streaming with tears, and when even the kettles had ceased to sing and did nothing but sigh, it was a place to make one despair.

"Ah, dearie me!" sighed the poor mothers. "We grumbled because the children were being naughty and getting into all kinds of mischief, but what wouldn't we give to have them back at home again with all their precious naughtiness and all their dear mischief?"

The saddest mother of all was Mrs. Riding Hood, for she was a widow, and she found the solitude of Woodbine Cottage unbearable in these dark December days. She decided to leave Banbury Cross and go back to live with Mother Hubbard. She had hoped that Puck would pay her a visit of consolation; but he had never once come near Woodbine Cottage, and Mrs. Riding Hood was afraid that he had gone to sleep until Spring with all the other Fairies,

Always went about with a crape band round his tail to show his grief.

Old Mother Hubbard welcomed her daughter kindly, for she had become much nicer since she was gobbled up by the Wolf, and she said that she was glad to have her back in the old home from which she had run away to marry the highwayman. Buff was most considerate and sympathetic, and always went about with a crape band round his tail to show his grief.

One stormy night, when the wind was howling round the cottage and shaking the trees in Tanglewood Coppice until it seemed as if they must soon all be blown down, Mrs. Riding Hood was sitting sadly before the fire and trying to behold in that glowing world the face of the little girl she had lost. Suddenly she became aware of a presence near her, and looking up, she saw the Hobgoblin regarding her compassionately.

"I know where Red Riding Hood is," he said.

"Is she alive?" the poor mother asked eagerly.

"Oh, yes, she's alive all right; but she and all the children of Banbury Cross are prisoners of His Immortal Solemnity and Goblin Lowness King Underon."

"And shall I never see her again?"

"Well, it wouldn't do for me to say too much," said the Hobgoblin cautiously, for he was as much a subject of King Underon as he was of King Oberon. "My advice is that you go and pay Mother Goose a visit. She will know what is best to be done."

Mrs. Riding Hood thanked the Hobgoblin with all her heart, and the next morning as soon as it was light she set out to try to find the way to Mother Goose's house, which was somewhere in the middle of the Old Forest and very near the borders of Fairyland. It was close upon twilight before she came upon the

huge white egg where Mother Goose lived in winter, and saw leaning against it the small spoon with which any one who wanted to be admitted had to tap three times on the shell.

The huge white egg where Mother Goose lived.

"Who's there?" Mother Goose called from within.

"It's Mrs. Riding Hood, Your Maternity," said the sentinel owl, presenting wings and standing at the salhoot as the visitor entered.

Mother Goose received Mrs. Riding Hood in her golden drawing-room, where she sat surrounded by geese of every age and size: white geese, grey geese, green geese, and little yellow goslings.

"I know what you've come to consult me about," Mother Goose said. "And I'm surprised that you haven't been to see me before. However, do not be too sad, because the time has come to get all the children back. It has been a harsh lesson for the parents and a hard lesson for the children; but the whole business was thoroughly gone into by Puck and myself with the best intentions, and now the moment has come to put matters right. The King and Queen of Hearts have not visited Banbury Cross since it ceased to be Banbury Gay; but Their Majesties are planning to arrive on Christmas Eve and hold their Christmas gambles there this year. It's only a week to Christmas now, and you must go back and prepare Woodbine Cottage for the return of Red Riding Hood. Tell all the fathers and mothers to get ready for the King and Queen and cheer up. I'll send you back to Mother Hubbard's immediately with Goosey Gander. Please tell the Hobgoblin I shall be much obliged if he will drive back with Goosey Gander, as I have something to say to him."

Mother Goose called Goosey Gander, who was very pleased to see Mrs. Riding Hood again, and only too delighted to give her a ride home.

"And bring back the Hubbard Hobgoblin with you, there's a good boy," said his dignified old mistress.

"Back-quack!" Goosey Gander replied.

Mrs. Riding Hood was overjoyed at the success of her visit, and she did not know how to thank the Hobgoblin warmly enough for his good advice.

"Well, Puck," Mother Goose said, when Mrs. Riding Hood had flown away with Goosey Gander, "I think the time has come."

Puck, who had been hiding in a curve of the room, came out and stretched his wings.

"I suppose Underon will let them go?" he said.

"Well, if he won't let them go for us, we must wake King Oberon, and that's all there is to it."

"Oberon won't like being woken up in December," Puck said. "He makes a great point of getting his full winter sleep. However, I daresay Underon will be quite pleasant. I've always taken care to keep in with him by going to his dull entertainments every year."

"I was proposing to send the Hubbard Hobgoblin as our representative," Mother Goose said. "Of course, if the King won't listen to him, you'll have to go and see him yourself. But I hope that won't be necessary."

"I hope it won't," Puck echoed. "I don't want to go grubbing all the way down there. Besides, my black suit is right at the bottom of my tree-trunk. It will mean unpacking all my things to get it out."

Presently Goosey Gander returned with the Hubbard Hobgoblin, who assured Mother Goose and Puck that he would do his best to get the children back.

"But there's one thing I ought to warn Your Maternity about," said the Hobgoblin. "King Underon is very touchy about mortals invading his kingdom, and from what I know of him he won't be at all anxious to let them see their way back to earth. Several goblins told me that he was furious at their finding the way down."

Puck and Mother Goose looked at each other.

"I'm afraid we took a bigger risk than we ought to have taken," said Mother Goose.

"Well, well, nothing venture nothing win," Puck replied. "We had to get the children spirited away somewhere to give their parents a lesson, and Queen Titania absolutely refused to let me hide them in Fairyland. She said that it would be too great a responsibility for the Fairy nurses to keep them from treading on the Fairy babies. Besides, as she argued, the children wouldn't at all appreciate returning to earth from Fairyland."

"I'm afraid we took a bigger risk than we ought to have taken," said Mother Goose.

"Tell His Immortal Solemnity from me," Mother Goose said to the Hobgoblin, "that I leave the manner of their return entirely to him, but that I should be extremely obliged if he could let them come home by Christmas Eve in time to take part in the revels. You might add that Santa Claus is sure to enquire particularly after Red Riding Hood, in whom he takes a very great interest. You might hint that if the old gentleman were offended he might refuse to allow the Goblins to take their annual cooling at the North Pole. Of course, you must be careful not to suggest to His Solemnity that we are demanding their return. You must make it quite clear that we look upon it as a great favour, and that anything he may require on

earth that is in our power to do for him we shall be most happy to do."

The Hobgoblin bowed to Mother Goose, and was setting out at once upon his mission, when she called him back.

"You might add that Mother Goose would be most obliged if he would send back Diddle Dumpty the cat with you, provided that His Solemnity has no objection to letting her go. And please present the King with this nest of golden eggs in token of my respect and esteem."

When the Hobgoblin had gone, Mother Goose explained to Puck that she had asked for Diddle Dumpty's immediate return, because her appearance in Banbury Cross with news that the children were coming back on Christmas Eve would cheer up the whole place.

"We don't want the royal visit to be a failure," Mother Goose said, "just when there seems a real chance of making Banbury Cross Banbury Gay once more."

The Hobgoblin had some difficulty in persuading King Underon to release Diddle Dumpty, to whom he had become greatly attached.

"I don't so much mind letting the children go. Although they work hard, one dwarf is worth six children at getting out the gold. But I really don't feel at all inclined to part with the cat."

The Hobgoblin was lying on his face in humble reverence, and he found it extremely difficult in such an attitude to argue eloquently about Diddle Dumpty's future.

"However, as Mother Goose sends me this nest of golden eggs, I suppose I must not be disagreeable,"

the King went on. "Very well, take the cat and get back to earth."

"May I most humbly and respectfully venture to ask Your Solemnity how it is proposed to send the children up?" the Hobgoblin asked.

"I shall send them up in a pie," said the Goblin King. "I don't want them to see the way."

"A pie?" the Hobgoblin repeated. He thought that he must have misunderstood King Underon. "A pie? Did I understand Your Solemnity to say a pie?"

"Yes, fool," the King said. "In a pie!"

"Your Solemnity will pardon my denseness," the Hobgoblin stammered. "But I don't quite understand how they will arrive up in a pie."

"Pastry rises, doesn't it, you blackass?" the King thundered.

"Oh, perfectly. I understand. Oh, yes. I begin to grasp the idea," said the Hobgoblin, who hoped that Mother Goose would know how to deal with such a mysterious pie. "And when will the pie arrive? I must once more beg Your Solemnity's pardon for my stupidity."

"The pie will be outside the twenty-fourth rabbit-burrow from Banbury Cross on Christmas Eve. Somebody must be there to receive it."

The Hobgoblin humbly asked permission to rise and take His Solemnity's answer back to Mother Goose.

"Yes, you may rise," the King said.

"And the cat may accompany me?" the Hobgoblin asked.

"Yes. But hurry up, or I may change my mind."

The Hobgoblin did not wait an instant, and seizing Diddle Dumpty's paw he hurried up.

"Phew-mew!" Diddle Dumpty gasped, when she and the Hobgoblin emerged from a fox's earth in Tanglewood Coppice, shook the coal-dust off themselves, and took a deep breath of starlit air. "I'm still all in a purrspiration!"

Did not wait an instant.

CHAPTER XX BANBURY GAY

CHAPTER XX BANBURY GAY

THE return of Diddle Dumpty with the news that the children were safe, and that they would be home for Christmas Eve, gave the people of Banbury Cross courage to prepare for the entertainment of the King and Queen of Hearts. It was a critical moment in the history of the village, because the King of Hearts had made up his mind that unless he found a great improvement there, he should cede all Banbury and its surroundings to one of the other kings whose realms joined his. It was unlikely that the King of Diamonds would want it, because it was not a rich village, nothing like so rich as his own village of Gotham. But both the King of Clubs and the King of Spades had cast envious eyes upon Banbury, and the King of Hearts had decided that if he parted with the place he should hand it over to the King of Clubs, a ferocious and warlike monarch who took pleasure in gloomy looks and surly dispositions.

The Lord High Ace.

A week before the Royalties were due the Lord High Ace arrived, with a crowd of servitors in the famous red livery of the Hearts, to prepare the old House of Cards, which the King of Hearts used as a hunting-box for his hunting pack in this part of the world. A Piquet of thirty-two men-at-arms stood on guard all round; a Cribbage was got ready for the

The House of Cards.

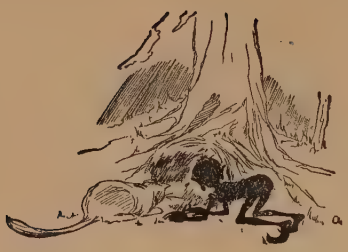
baby Prince of Hearts, outside the door of which his old nurse Loo said 'Whist!' to keep the servants quiet when the little Prince was asleep.

Mrs. Riding Hood persuaded her mother to move into Woodbine Cottage until Spring. The little parlour was turned into a bedroom for the Dame. Diddle Dumpty and Buff slept on the landing outside Red Riding Hood's room.

The King and Queen of Hearts made a state entry into Banbury Cross on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. They were met by the Lord High Ace, who informed them that they would find no more loyal village than Banbury in all their dominions. An address, read by Doctor Foster, was presented on the village green, and the King, when he made his gracious reply, invited everybody to supper with him that evening in the House of Cards to open the Christmas celebrations.

The parents who had lost their children tried to seem cheerful, and to look as if they intended to enjoy themselves. But it was very difficult, and in spite of Diddle Dumpty's assurances they began to be afraid that their children would not get home in time to take part in the festivities. You may be sure that Jack Horner did not bother his head much about the other children; he was thoroughly looking forward to the Christmas pie, which was even now being baked in the royal kitchens, and which was so deliciously rich that the smell of its hot plums and spices was already being wafted about the village. Yes, he was a very greedy little boy, and he did nothing else all that afternoon but exercise the muscles of his thumb.

Of course, when Mother Hubbard moved into town, as she called it, from Tanglewood Cottage, the Hob-



Hub and Diddle Dumpty sallied forth to watch anxiously by the twenty-fourth rabbit-burrow.

goblin came too; for hobgoblins, although you may not often see them, are sociable creatures and never stay long in an empty house. Mrs. Riding Hood was extremely glad to have him about, because she was relying on him and Diddle Dumpty to superintend the return of the children. The Hobgoblin was encouraged to come down from the hob as often as he liked, even though he did make the cushions rather black. Mrs. Riding Hood, who was most anxious to repay his kindness, asked him what he should like for a present, and he told her that he wanted a name more than anything else. So it was decided to call him Hub, which pleased him so much that he danced up and down the chimney quite half a dozen times to show his delight.

When the royal procession had passed and the shades of night were falling fast, Hub and Diddle Dumpty sallied forth to watch anxiously by the twenty-fourth rabbit-burrow from Banbury Cross. In the distance they could hear Jack Horner, who had become chief choirboy since Tom Tucker went away, going round the village and singing:

Dames, get up and bake your pies,
Bake your pies, bake your pies;
Dames, get up and bake your pies
On Christmas Day in the morning.

"I hope our pie won't be late," said Diddle Dumpty. "It's getting purretty cold out here."

And it *was* cold. Jack Frost the silversmith had been hard at work decorating the trees and hedges and window-panes in honour of the royal visit; so while Hub and Diddle Dumpty are shivering outside the rabbit-burrow, I think that you and I will go below to warm ourselves and find out what has been happening to the children.

Down in the mighty cavern of King Underon they were watching the Goblins hard at work making extraordinary preparations for something.

"What are they doing?" Red Riding Hood asked.

"It looks to me," Robert Rowley stammered, "as if they were getting ready to b-b-b-ake something. They surely can't be g-g-going to b-b-bake us?"

The children turned pale at this dreadful suggestion, which made a great impression on them, because Robert Rowley was not likely to be wrong about anything to do with baking. When I said that the children turned pale, I should have said that they felt pale, because they were by now quite as black as the goblins themselves.

At this moment King Underon himself entered the cavern with solemn and majestic tread; and the goblin bakers, who were covered with black dust, just as bakers on earth are always covered with white dust, prostrated themselves before him.

"May it please Your Solemnity," said the chief baker, "I

"May it please Your Solemnity," said the chief baker, "I don't think that we possess a dish large enough to hold twenty-four children."

don't think that we possess a dish large enough to hold twenty-four children."

You ought to have seen the way the children looked at one another when they heard this.

"Very well," said King Underon, "I will change them into mice."

At this all the little girls gave a loud wail.

"Oh no, please, Your Solemnity, anything but that," they begged. "We'd rather be anything but mice."

"If we're going to be baked, it doesn't much matter what we're changed into," said one of the boys.

"But it would be so awful before we were baked," the girls protested. "Oh, we should die of fright."

Each little girl was thinking of finding herself in a pie with twenty-three mice, and the idea made each of them nearly shudder herself to pieces.

King Underon laughed grimly.

"Then I'll give you your choice. You can either be changed into mice and find your own way up to earth, or you can be changed into birds and baked up in a pie."

With one accord all the little girls cried:

"Please, Your Solemnity, we'd much much much rather be changed into birds and baked."

"Well, girls are always allowed first choice," said King Underon. "And so birds you shall be. I hope it will be a lesson to you not to come spying what happens under the earth. BE CHANGED INTO BIRDS AND DO NOT BECOME CHILDREN AGAIN UNTIL YOU CAN SING A SONG OF SIXPENCE. Baker, throw a pocketful of rye into the pie, in case they feel peckish on the way up."

Rye is always used by the goblins instead of wheat, because they prefer black bread.

"Make the pastry as light as possible," the King went on, "for it has to rise a very long way."

I cannot pretend to explain how the children were changed into birds and baked in a pie without being burnt. But they were. Nor can I say how the pie rose to the surface of the earth, and suddenly appeared outside the twenty-fourth rabbit-burrow from Banbury Cross. But it did.

The whole affair was managed by what is called Black Art, of which King Underon was a master.

"Hip-pip-hurrah!" Hub shouted. "Here's the pie. And oh, isn't it nice and warm!"

"But purr are the children?" Diddle Dumpty asked.

Buff came along at this moment, wagging his tail and barking at the top of his voice:

"Bow-wow-how are they all?"

"They're supposed to be in this pie," Diddle Dumpty said, "impurrobable as it sounds."

"We'd better get them bow-wow-out," said Buff, and he began to scratch at the pie-crust.

"Bow-wouch!" he exclaimed. "It *is* hot!"

Diddle Dumpty tapped the pie cautiously with her paw, but she drew it back quickly and agreed with Buff that it was much too hot to meddle with.

"Mew'd better try, Hub," she said. "Mew're used to heat."

But Hub could not crack the pie crust, and the three of them looked at one another in dismay.

"Look here, Buff," said Hub, "you'd better escort Mother Hubbard and Mrs. Riding Hood up to the royal supper-party. Diddle Dumpty and I will see if we can open the pie in our kitchen."

Buff hurried away; and presently, when Woodbine Cottage was deserted, Hub and Diddle Dumpty put

" It's a most purrplexing business."

the pie down on the kitchen floor. They tried once more to break into it by hammering it with the tongs, and digging at it with the shovel, and poking at it with the poker. But, whatever they did, they simply could not crack the crust.

" Red Riding Hood ! Red Riding Hood ! " Diddle Dumpty shouted. " Are you inside ? "

She and Hub put their ears close to the pie-crust to listen for an answer.

" I fancy that I heard a sound like the chirp of a bird," said Hub.

" A bird ? " Diddle Dumpty exclaimed. " Do you think it's a magpie ? Waul, I'll swear I heard nothing at all. It's a most purrplexing business. I shall never be able to face the purrents. I purromised them they should have their children back this evening without fail. They'll say that it's a real pie-crust purromise, except that this pie-crust can't be broken. I'll go down into the cellar and get the coal-hammer. If that won't break this pie, nothing will."

Just as Diddle Dumpty arrived in the cellar, Puck appeared from the secret passage like a rat's hole that he had used in the days when he haunted Woodbine

Cottage. As soon as he heard what had happened, he ordered Diddle Dumpty to take the pie up to the House of Cards at once and set it before the King.

"But who'll open it?" Diddle Dumpty asked.

"Don't ask questions," said Puck sternly. "Do as you're told, cat."

So Diddle Dumpty put the pie on her head and her fiddle under her arm and hurried along to the House of Cards.

All the guests were gathered in the great hall. The Yule log had just been dragged in and was crackling merrily in the middle of the huge fire that was roaring up the chimney. The poor fathers and mothers of Banbury Cross were trying to be jolly and pretending to enjoy themselves; but they could not refrain from looking toward the door every other minute in the hope that their lost children would suddenly appear. The King of Hearts, who was the kindest of men, understood how much they were suffering and what brave faces they were trying to put upon it. It pleased him greatly, and he had already changed his mind about ceding Banbury Cross to the King of Clubs.

When Diddle Dumpty came in with the pie all the parents ran to ask for mews of the children; but she avoided answering any awkward questions by saying: "Make room there! Make room! and purrmit me to set this dainty dish before the King."

"Oh, what a glorious pie!" Jack Horner exclaimed, and before anybody could stop him he had rushed forward and plunged his thumb into the crust.

How he yelled! Puck's punishment

How he yelled!

was a severe one, for the wretched boy had broken his thumb. However, he had broken the crust as well, and out from the pie hopped twenty-four blackbirds.

Sing a song of sixpence!
A pocketful of rye!
Four-and-twenty blackbirds
Baked in a pie!

When the pie was opened,
The birds began to sing.
Was not that a dainty dish
To set before the King?

And immediately the twenty-four blackbirds began to sing:

I love sixpence, pretty little sixpence,
I love sixpence better than my life;
I spent a penny of it, I spent another,
And then took fourpence home to my wife.

Oh, my little fourpence, pretty little fourpence,
I love fourpence better than my life;
I spent a penny of it, I spent another,
And then took twopence home to my wife.

Oh, my little twopence, my pretty little twopence,
I love twopence better than my life;
I spent a penny of it, I spent another,
And then took nothing home to my wife.

Oh, my little nothing, my pretty little nothing,
What will nothing buy for my wife?
I have nothing, I spend nothing,
I love nothing better than my wife.

The last words of the song of sixpence were no sooner sung than all the children appeared as their

natural selves, and there was nothing left of their adventure with King Underon and the Goblins except a little heap of black feathers on the table.

You can imagine the joy of the people of Banbury Cross when they saw their children again, and I am sure that the King of Hearts was never so really the King of Hearts as he was on that Christmas Eve. It did not matter how much noise the children made over the games; it did not matter what pranks they played. Everybody just smiled at everybody else and said, "Boys will be boys" or "When the heart is young." The festivities came to an end at midnight, when all the bells rang out a merry peal and the children hurried home to hang up their stockings.

What a night it was at Woodbine Cottage, and how Joan jumped for joy to find herself really and truly no longer alone! When the little girls hung up their stockings, Diddle Dumpty hung up her boots and Buff hung up his collar. Nor was Hub forgotten in the general rejoicings, for a large bowl of milk, of which hobgoblins are particularly fond, was set down for him in the kitchen fender.

I should like to be able to tell you that Red Riding Hood had another talk with Santa Claus that night; but the old gentleman would not, for the second time, break his rule of not waking children, even for her. However, when she found her stocking full in the morning, she knew that he must have been thinking about her, because he had brought her all the toys she most wanted. Tied to Buff's collar was the marrow-bone of a polar bear, which it took him days and days to gnaw through. And what do you think Diddle Dumpty found in her boots? Two dear little snow-white kittens, with eiderdown mittens, brought by Santa Claus all the way from the North Pole.

When Christmas morning broke, a lovely blue and silver morning, Banbury Cross was Banbury Gay once more. All the houses and cottages looked extremely jolly. Such smooth thatches, such open doors, such beaming windows, such rosy tiles, such laughing eaves! There was not one house nor one cottage in the whole village that had not a pleasant expression. Landlord Porgie's inn was once again *The Three Jolly Pigeons*. Even Sexton Daw had put on flesh since the King's party last night, and he now looked as plump as a partridge and as sleek as a crow. Farmer Muffet had re-engaged all the children he had dismissed, and Mr. Benjamin Blue was thinking of applying to the King for a licence to be known in future as Mr. Reuben Red. Red, indeed, was the popular colour in Banbury Gay, for it was the colour of Red Riding Hood's cloak and of the livery of the King of Hearts and of the King's warm heart itself.

That Christmas was a morning on which all the four Seasons of the year met together and rejoiced, for it was so fine that Puck took it upon himself to wake King Oberon and Queen Titania.

It was Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter all in one, so that all the children of Banbury could go round singing:

Here we come gathering nuts and may,
Nuts and may, nuts and may;
Here we come gathering nuts and may
On a fine and frosty morning.

But toward evening King Oberon and Queen Titania went to sleep again until Spring, and the Snow Queen, who had travelled South with Santa Claus, flew round and round above Banbury Gay, weaving for it a white mantle of soft and silent snow. From

inside their cosy cottage Red Riding Hood and Jumping Joan watched the snowflakes falling, and said to each other what fun they would have snowballing to-morrow.

Banbury Cross was Banbury Gay once more.

"But I wish I'd seen Santa Claus last night," Red Riding Hood sighed. "I did so want to thank him for all the happiness he has given me."

"I saw him," said Hub, who was perched on the hob. "He sent you his love, and he asked me to tell

you to look out for him next Summer in the depths of the forest."

And while Red Riding Hood is gazing out of the window and watching the snowflakes fall faster and faster, the bells of Banbury Gay ring out once more, and this is what they ring :

Merry are the bells, and merry would they ring,
Merry was myself, and merry could I sing.
With a merry ding-dong, happy, gay and free,
And a merry sing-song, happy let us be !

Waddle goes your gait, and hollow are your hose,
Noddle goes your pate, and purple is your nose ;
Merry is your sing-song, happy, gay and free,
With a merry ding-dong, happy let us be !

Merry have we met, and merry have we been,
Merry let us part, and merry meet again ;
With a merry sing-song, happy, gay and free,
And a merry ding-dong, happy let us be !

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